

# Who Stole My Religion?

Revitalizing Judaism and applying Jewish  
values to help heal our imperiled planet



*"An authentic and inspirational view of  
what traditional Judaism is and should be."*

*-- Alon Tal, Ben Gurion University*

Richard H. Schwartz, Ph.D.

with Rabbi Yonassan Gershom

## What people are saying about *Who Stole My Religion?*

*The many endorsements below are included to show that it is not just the author himself, but many other people also – including Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Jews, as well as Christians, and Muslims – who think their religion has been “stolen” by right-wing politics, but who still believe that compassionate religious values have relevance to current crises. Provision of a blurb here does not imply that the person who provided it agrees with everything in this book. However, it is hoped that the voices of the people who submitted the statements below, as well as many more voices, will be raised, each in their own way, to help revitalize Judaism and other religions and to apply religious values effectively in response to the many threats to humanity today.*

“For many years now, Richard Schwartz has been a clear, unwavering voice for a more compassionate, more humane and holier Judaism. *Who Stole My Religion?* offers Jews and non-Jews alike a critique of many of the unhappy trends in the Jewish world today and an authentic and inspirational view of what traditional Judaism is and should be.” — **Professor Alon Tal**, Ben Gurion University of the Negev; Chairman of “The Green Movement” (Israel’s Green Party); author of *Pollution in the Promised Land* and many other books and articles on environmental issues in Israel.

“No one has been more creative, committed, and consistent than Richard Schwartz in arguing for a Judaism that can address in

all its depth the world crisis that all humanity and all the life-forms of our planet face today.” — **Rabbi Arthur Waskow**, director, The Shalom Center; author, *Down-to-Earth Judaism*, *Seasons of Our Joy*, and many other works on Jewish thought and action.

“The challenging title of this welcome new book by Prof. Richard Schwartz, one of the most insightful commentators on Jewish scriptural interpretation, says a great deal about his struggle to reclaim Judaism in the 21st century from those who would narrow its scope to ethnocentrism and self-interest. Schwartz is a major protagonist in the battle to present the humanitarian insights and universal truths that have been part of the Jewish tradition, from its earliest holy texts to the present day.” — **Rabbi Gerald Serotta**, Founder, Rabbis for Human Rights, North America and Executive Director, Clergy Beyond Borders

“Richard Schwartz has boldly broadened the Jewish agenda, and allowed fresh air into the dogma and doctrine of Jewish faith and political and social judgment with candor. He reminds us that ours is a questioning faith of a choosing people in its never-ending search for that which embraces all the searchers of Godliness. *Who Stole My Religion?* is a book worthy of deep and respectful reading.” — **Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis**, rabbi emeritus of Valley Beth Shalom in Encino, California, one of America’s leading pulpit rabbis and a respected, widely-published author.

“I commend Dr. Schwartz for his courage and integrity in reminding the Jewish community of its historic mission to serve as a light unto the nations. While it is always safer to tell people what they want to hear, I am thrilled that at least one person has the guts to challenge our people to live up to the highest ideals of the prophets by acting as responsible stewards of our planet, fighting to protect those who need our help, and practicing kindness to animals. His book *Who Stole My Religion?* will serve as a lightning rod to stimulate critically needed discussion about what it means to be Jewish and

how we can live an ethically Jewish life.” — **Rabbi Barry Silver**, Rabbi of Congregation L’Dor Va-Dor in Lake Worth, Florida, Former Florida State Representative, Founder and co-Chairman of the Palm Beach County Environmental Coalition.

“Once again Richard Schwartz has produced a thought provoking book. *Who Stole My Religion?* will be a very positive addition to our libraries. His writing is powerful and thought provoking. As always, Richard is not afraid to challenge us.” — **Rabbi Michael M. Cohen**, Director of Development, Friends of the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies

*“Who Stole My Religion?”* covers a multitude of topics that are dear to the author’s heart. When he writes about social and religious attitudes, his voice is no less strong and imperative than when he writes about climate change and all its ramifications for the changes that the human race must make in its collective lifestyle — or perish! Traditionally Judaism — the Judaism that Richard Schwartz so bravely and eloquently presents — would uphold and mandate these changes. I commend this book to anyone for whom Judaism is cherished as teaching us how to live our lives in loving stewardship of God’s world.” — **Rabbi Simchah Roth**, Herzliya, Israel

“As a Jewish animal rights activist, I have always considered Richard Schwartz to be a mentor and someone I admire tremendously. His new book only corroborates that opinion as it passionately and persuasively goes beyond even the most important 21st-century concerns into the heart of Judaism itself. Every Jew — and non-Jew who is concerned with the future of our planet — should read *Who Stole My Religion?*” — **Pauline Dubkin Yearwood**, Managing Editor, *Chicago Jewish News*

“In this time of ubiquitous polarization and demonization of “the other,” *Who Stole My Religion?* makes a cogent, compelling call for Jews to turn from unquestioning acceptance of particular cultural and political positions back to core

religious values of wisdom, compassion, and self-examination. No nation or religion is automatically good; frequent comparison of values with behaviors is a huge part of what *makes* good people, good nations and good religions. Professor Schwartz weaves a readable and interesting tapestry of current and historical facts, scriptural citations, study findings, authoritative quotes and heartfelt common sense, all in the cause of finding the best course for Jews, for peace, and for the world. Highly recommended.” — **Karima Vargas Bushnell**, co-author of *Cultural Detective Islam* (tm) and teacher of Intercultural Communication at Metropolitan State University. She helps others explore the borderlands between different religions and cultures, has a particular interest in cross-cultural mysticism, and now guides a small Sufi circle, the *Nur Ashki Jerrahi* Circle of *Ishq*.

“Schwartz offers a vision of traditional Judaism alive with love for humanity and respect for creation — a love and respect embodied as much in daily observance of halachah as in pragmatic actions to heal a wounded world. Even more, Schwartz's insights hold the potential to heal a deep rift in Judaism: he shows us that the elements of Orthodoxy that have dismissed urgent issues of social justice, like the problem of global warming, do not speak for all traditional Jews, much less traditional Judaism. For all persons who love Jewish law no less than Judaism's radical call to justice, Schwartz doesn't just ask 'Who Stole My Religion?' — he shows a path to reclaim it.” — **Aaron Gross**, Ph.D., Founder and CEO of Farm Forward and Assistant Professor of Jewish Studies at the University of San Diego

“Richard Schwartz, in his pioneering advocacy of vegetarianism over many decades, has brought knowledge of its sources in the most profound and meaningful Jewish values and principles both to the Jewish community and into the American society-at-large. In his groundbreaking new work, *Who Stole My Religion?*, he expands on the Jewish values regarding the environment, animal protection, health and the elimination of poverty into a trenchant critique of how the Jewish community

is, and is not, responding in accordance with the spirit of Judaism to these and other imperative issues such as climate change, criticism of Israeli policies, and social and economic inequality. The book is a must-read for people who urgently need to know that what passes for Judaism in some circles in the community these days is an avoidance and violation of the spirit of Judaism rather than an embrace of it — and how to overcome this grievous condition, retrieve and revive Judaism, and possibly contribute to saving the planet.” — **Aviva Cantor**, author of *Jewish Women/Jewish Men: The Legacy of Patriarchy in Jewish Life* and *The Egalitarian Haggada*; Vice President of CHAI: Concern for Helping Animals in Israel.

*“Who Stole My Religion?”* is magnificent! It is a vision of holiness, wholeness, and healing that speaks to the challenges facing Jews — and the rest of us — in the twenty-first century. This is what *tikkun olam* and *bal tashchit* and being a ‘light unto the nations’ are all about. The book is an eloquent *summum* of Richard Schwartz’s vision that speaks to everyone, Jew and non-Jew alike. It will extend far into the future as a beacon for those who are tempted to lose faith, not only in God, but also in the ability of our tormented species to desist from destroying our neighbors, our home, and ourselves. My heartfelt congratulations!” — **Norm Phelps**, long time vegetarian activist; author of *The Dominion of Love: Animal Rights According to the Bible*, *The Great Compassion: Buddhism and Animal Rights*, and *The Longest Struggle: Animal Advocacy From Pythagoras to PETA*.

*“Tekiah!* The venerable Richard Schwartz once again sounds a shofar blast of warning to wake up the Jewish community and the world. As unabated greed and climate change threaten life and religion as we know them, Schwartz urges actions rooted in the very heart of Judaism. We all would be wise to heed the call.” — **David Krantz**, President and Chairperson, Green Zionist Alliance: The Grassroots Campaign for a Sustainable Israel

“Richard Schwartz has done it again! *Who Stole My Religion?*

is an important, fascinating, and necessary book, perhaps needed more now than ever to create peace and environmental sustainability, while enhancing spirituality. Given the *oeuvre* of his leadership, writings, and other efforts, Dr. Schwartz deserves a Nobel Peace Prize. While particularly relevant to Jews, this wise and prophetic book would be useful for anybody who appreciates the highest values of their religion more than stultifying dogma and conservative ideology. Read this book, reclaim your religion, and let's co-create a better world!" — **Dan Brook**, Ph.D., Instructor at City College of San Francisco and San Jose State University; author of *Modern Revolution*, *Understanding Sociology*, and *An Alef-Bet Kabbalah*.

"Richard Schwartz's previous work has been adored and well-respected during these past thirty years, but there comes a time when a man such as Richard produces his opus/epic tome, defining Judaism's magnificent and inspiring past, present conflicts, and glorious future. Such a book is now in your hands." — **Robert Cohen**, author, lecturer, and director of notmilk.com

"Richard Schwartz knows as well as anybody how Jewish teachings apply to the world's most pressing problems. The impressive scope of his concern is fully on display in his new book. *Who Stole My Religion?* is a very personal story about how and why he became a Jewish activist and what he expects of his religion. I congratulate Richard for writing such an honest, engaging, important and timely book. I recommend it highly." — **Charles Patterson**, author of *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*

"With so many people apparently oblivious of the climate catastrophe the world is rapidly approaching, *Who Stole My Religion?* is a breath of fresh air. I hope this excellent book will be widely read and its message heeded, helping fulfill Dr. Schwartz's dream of shifting our imperiled world to a sustainable path." — **Bruce Friedrich**, peace and justice advocate; author of *The Animal Activist's Handbook*

“There are woefully few examples in history of lone individuals who bravely rose up to identify the underlying causes of problems that have plagued nations, societies and indeed, the world at large. All too often those voices were rapidly silenced, either through political subjugation, ignorance or indifference. Fortunately, despite overwhelming odds, there are those who have made a profound difference to the reigning status quo. Richard Schwartz is one such man. His new book identifies much of what we as Jews have failed to recognize as our planet heads inexorably towards an ecological meltdown. Politically, ethically, morally, economically, and scientifically, we are guilty of wearing blinkers when we look around and perceive what is happening to our world, especially in the face of global warming and also in our inability to obtain a just and peaceful settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

“Soundly basing his views on the profound teachings of the Torah and the inherent wisdom and compassion of our ancient faith, he provides an alarming analysis of how we are failing not only ourselves but also our duty to be a ‘light unto the nations.’ This book should be essential reading for everyone. I applaud Richard as a maverick and as a *tzaddik*, a truly righteous man in every sense of the word. He is one of the few individuals who gives me a sense that there is still hope if we act now to reverse the trends that are pushing us towards disaster.” — **Lionel Friedberg**, Emmy Award-winning producer, director, writer and documentarian; Producer of *A Sacred Duty: Applying Jewish Values to Help Heal the World*.

“If you think Judaism consists of occasional visits to a synagogue or Temple where congregants perform rituals and recite prayers without feeling and attend mainly to socialize, then this book is a must read. Schwartz reminds us that the very essence of Judaism is to struggle to find what is right and to have the courage to do right, including speaking out against evil. Worship accompanied by indifference to evil, the prophets said, is an abomination to God. Schwartz fulfills the best of Judaism by urging us to cry out against immorality, injustice, deceit, cruelty, and violence toward all living beings, rather than condone it with our silence, for in condoning empty rituals and



standing silent in the face of immoral deeds, we make a mockery of Judaism itself.” — **Nina Natelson**, Director, Concern for Helping Animals in Israel (CHAI)

“Richard Schwartz’s illuminating and challenging new book is a valuable guide to living a humane Jewish life in our troubled and violent age.” — **Murray Polner**, former editor of *Present Tense*, co-editor of *Shalom: The Jewish Peace Letter*.

“Richard Schwartz is the most knowledgeable person alive on the teachings of Judaism on protecting animals and nature. His writings are brilliant, and his books always valuable and worth reading and discussing. I say this as a conservative, even a right-winger, who strongly disagrees with Richard’s devotion to liberal tenets. But when he discusses the fate of our planet and the many environmental issues that threaten human civilization, and the responsibility of Jews to take action, there is no one better.” — **Lewis Regenstein**, a 40 year veteran of the animal protection movement, is author of *Replenish the Earth: The Teachings of the World’s Religions on Protecting Animals and Nature*.

“*Who Stole My Religion?* is a challenge to contemporary Jewish communities: there is so much we should check about our current practices and affiliations! Is it a call for renovation of Jewish thought? Schwartz’s answers for today’s pressing issues derive from compassion and the pursuit of peace and justice. These, as he persuasively shows, go back to the roots of Jewish tradition. For me the book *reclaims* my religion, returning to the core of Jewish values — as my parents knew them and as did generations before them.” — **Yossi Wolfson**, Coordinator of Ginger, the Vegetarian Community Center in Jerusalem.

“Richard Schwartz has been a consistent, clear, compassionate voice for the planet. This book once again illustrates his wisdom, insight and willingness to speak up. If the Jewish community takes this book to heart and makes the necessary changes, the world can follow. We can co-create a world that respects all life.” — **Rae Sikora**, co-founder Plant Peace Daily;

Institute for Humane Education, and Vegfund.

“If ever there was a book that inspires us to recall the purest values of Judaism — it is *Who Stole My Religion?* Richard Schwartz, a true patriot for his faith, pushes the spiritual envelope of our conscience — and consciousness — to a deeper and richer re-acquaintance with this glorious faith tradition as he unflinchingly holds up a sometimes painful mirror from which Jews and non-Jews alike can no longer avert our gaze.”— **Dr. Kris Lecakes Haley**, Department of Humane Religious Studies Co-Chair, Emerson Theological Institute.

“This is a book of plain speaking. In light of pressing economic, environmental, social, and political difficulties, we are in great need of such informed and candid commentary from members within each of the world's great religions. Who will be next to step up to the plate?” — **Lisa Kemmerer**, Ph.D., Associate Professor of philosophy and Religion at Montana State University, author and editor of *Animals and World Religions*, *Sister Species*, and half a dozen other books on social justice issues and/or religions.

**WHO STOLE MY RELIGION?**  
**Revitalizing Judaism**  
**and Applying Jewish Values**  
**to Help Heal Our Imperiled Planet**

**by**

**Richard H. Schwartz, Ph.D.**

**with Rabbi Yonassan Gershom**

**Lulu Press, Inc.**

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**DISCLAIMER: This book is a work of independent editorial commentary. The opinions expressed within it are entirely those of their authors and do not represent the policies of Lulu Press, Jewish Vegetarians of North America, or any other organization(s) that Richard Schwartz or Yonassan Gershom belong to.**

**SECOND EBOOK EDITION**

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## Dedication

**To Yosef Ben Shlomo Hakohen (Jeff Oboler) (z"tl)**, who passed away as this book was being completed. Yosef was the author of the book, *The Universal Jew*, a friend and valuable advisor to me and to many others, a true *tzaddik*, a bridge between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews and between Jews and others, a person dedicated to Torah learning and teaching and to spreading widely Judaism's universal messages through the work of his Hazon website. We will miss Yosef and his wisdom, joy and *niggunim* (tunes), and we must try to apply his insights and nudging to the tasks of outreach and organizing to which he dedicated his too-brief but shining life.

**And to all Jews (and others) working to apply Jewish values toward seeking a more just, compassionate, healthy, peaceful, and environmentally sustainable world.** May this book help inspire more people to engage in these vital pursuits and help make their work more effective and accomplished, so that we may create a more livable world for future generations.

## **An important note about the ebook version**

This ebook contains the same text as the print version, with the following minor exceptions: (1) color photos instead of black and white as in the book (color printing is very expensive); (2) the removal of one endorsement blurb at the request of its author after publication (he objected to some political material included in the final edit); (3) some changes to some of the photo captions; and (4) and revision of two footnotes. Otherwise, the main content is the same. (These minor revisions will also be made to the paperback in a future edition.)

However, in order to get the hyperlinks to work properly online, we had to compile the chapter files using Lulu Press's program directly from MS Word, instead of first making each chapter into a separate PDF file and then compiling (the way we did with the print edition.) Unfortunately, this gave us less control over some aspects of the layout. In some cases, this produced slight irregularities in the layout or caused a few lines of text to shift across pages, but does not affect the content.

As this is an academic work that people are likely to cite in future works, we felt it was important to have the page numbering remain the same in both print and ebook editions. For this reason, there are no ePubs, Nook, or Kindle versions, because these formats "reflow" the text and do not retain the integrity of the layout or the page numbers. At this time, the only electronic format available is this PDF version.

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**Books by Richard Schwartz**

**Mathematics and Global Survival**

**Judaism and Global Survival**

**Judaism and Vegetarianism**

**Who Stole My Religion?**

**In addition, over 150 articles and interviews,  
plus numerous podcasts, can be found at:  
<http://www.jewishveg.com/schwartz>**

**\* \* \* \* \***

**Books by Yonassan Gershom**

**49 Gates of Light**

**Beyond the Ashes**

**From Ashes to Healing**

**Eight Candles of Consciousness**

**Jewish Themes in Star Trek**

**Work-in-progress:**

**Notes from a Jewish Thoreau**

**\* \* \* \* \***

**For further info or to discuss the issues in this book,  
visit our blog at [WhoStoleMyReligion.com](http://WhoStoleMyReligion.com)**



## Foreword

**By Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz**

In an age of extremism and self-absorption, Dr. Richard Schwartz's *Who Stole My Religion?* reminds us of our global responsibilities. In a tragic world overflowing with poverty, cruelty, destruction, and war, voices of faith and reason must remind us of our core values. In times of despair, Jewish leadership must unequivocally stand with courage in a fight against oppression and injustice. Dr. Schwartz helps us to remember that the Jewish tradition can be a guide to liberation and healing in our complex, interconnected world.

We must work to prevent Jewish thought from being hijacked to the monastic serenity of quiet mountaintops where peace is chosen over truth and the self over the collective. Authentic religion today is lived in the hustle and bustle of the streets and it is here that Torah can be most transformative for 21st century Jews. We must also call a moratorium on the perpetuation of partisan markers as the primary images of Jewish political identity. In lieu of continuing to construct the monolithic traditional liberal and conservative identities that have become so pervasive throughout the Jewish community, we need more radicals! Liberals and Conservatives are too frequently content with bumper stickers, quoting stats at meals and in emails, cultivating animosity for the opposition, and then doing *bubkis*, doing nothing, from a distance. Radicals, on the other hand, ensure that they win in the streets. It isn't enough to care and to talk. We must transform.

Our theological calling to the public arena is not inherently a political summons. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel argued in the first half of the twentieth century: “We affirm the principle of separation of church and state. We reject the separation of religion and the human situation.” So too, for religion to matter, it must be deeply responsive to and molded by the society in which we are embedded. As Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once argued, “The physical needs of another are my own spiritual needs.” Spiritual life is embedded in the presence of the crude realities before our eyes, and to neglect them is to resemble a fish unaware of the very water it swims in. Dr. Schwartz reminds us that we must take ownership of our Judaism and stand up courageously to address the greatest moral challenges of our time. We should heed this call!

**Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz**, Founder & President, *Uri L'Tzedek* (Orthodox Social Justice); UCLA Hillel’s Senior Jewish Educator; chosen in 2008 by the *Jewish Week* as “one of 36 of the most influential Jewish leaders under the age of 36;” Named by United Jewish Communities in 2009 as one of five “Jewish Community Heroes.”

## Author's Preface

*In this hour, we, the living [post-Holocaust Jews], are “the people of Israel.” The tasks begun by the patriarchs and prophets and continued by their descendants are now entrusted to us. We are either the last Jews or those who will hand over the entire past to generations to come. We will either forfeit or enrich the legacy of ages. — Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel<sup>1</sup>*

*On some positions, Cowardice asks the question, “Is it safe?” Expediency asks the question. “Is it politic?” And Vanity comes along and asks the question, “Is it popular?” But Conscience asks the question, “Is it right?” And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because Conscience tells him it is right.” — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>2</sup>*

*Rabbi Tarfon said: “The day is short, the work is urgent, the workers are lazy but the reward is great and the Owner is insistent... It is not for you to complete the work [of perfecting the world], but neither are you free to quit.” — Pirkei Avot 2:17-18*

**Here is my long-held vision for Judaism in this time of multiple crises:**

*To be a Jew is to see the world through the eyes of God, to be unreconciled to the world as it is, to be discontented with the status quo and unafraid to challenge it.*

*To be a Jew is to be a co-worker with God in the task of perfecting the world, to know that the world remains unredeemed and that we must work with God to redeem it.*

*To be a Jew is to feel deeply the harms done to others, to speak out in the face of wrongdoing, and to prod the conscience of those who passively accept the status quo.*

*To be a Jew is to stand apart from the world, to be a non-conformist, to shout "NO" when others murmur "yes" to injustice, to actively help uplift those in need and try to correct injustices, even as others stand idly by.*

*To be a Jew is to be intoxicated with a dream of social justice, to have an abiding concern for others, to have compassion without condescension for people who are poor, weak, and suffering.*

*To be a Jew means to know that God's name can be sanctified by our actions, and trying to live a life compatible with being created in God's image by doing justly, acting kindly, and in all ways imitating God's attributes.*

*To be a Jew means to believe in the unlimited potential of people in spite of the evil and injustice around us, recognizing that we have been chosen to serve as an example, to strive to be "a light unto the nations."*

*To be a Jew means of course many specific practices concerning Shabbat, kashrut, and much more. It means study and worship, and most of all action and observance. It means all these things and far, far more.*

*It is not always easy to be a Jew, but it is always a very significant and worthwhile endeavor.*

## **This book is meant to be a wake-up call**

Its primary aim is to show that the world is heading toward a “perfect storm” of existential crises: sudden, catastrophic climate change; severe environmental degradation; devastating scarcities of food, water and energy; and other critical threats to life as we know and value it, and that the application of Jewish values can make a major difference in shifting our imperiled world toward a sustainable path. Please consider:

- **The climate crisis:** There are increasing indications that the world is rapidly approaching an unprecedented climate catastrophe. The year 2010 tied 2005 as the warmest year since humanity began recording the earth's temperature over 150 years ago and it was also the wettest. The previous decade was the warmest decade. Glaciers and polar ice sheets are melting far faster than even the worst-case projections of climate scientists a few years ago. In January 2011, Australia had the worst cyclone in its history. There have been recent floods of what some have described as almost biblical proportions in many countries, including China, Brazil, and Pakistan, and most recently along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers in the United States. Many countries, including China, the United States, and Israel are facing severe long-term droughts, and this has led some climatologists to predict that this century will be called, “the Century of Drought.” For decades climate scientists have predicted that global warming will simultaneously increase precipitation and flooding in some regions due to its evaporative effect (which results in more moisture in the atmosphere), while increasing drought in others due to its drying effect (same cause; opposite outcomes, depending on the location; both traumatic), which is why some climate educators have recently taken to describing the phenomenon as “global weirding.” While many people are still in denial

about climate change, the very strong scientific consensus about its potential danger to humanity is indicated by many peer-reviewed articles in respected science journals and statements by science academies all over the world.

- **World hunger.** We appear to be at the start of a new era of chronic food shortages that have great potential to sharply worsen. Prices for grain have recently risen to record levels. One reason is that a tremendous heat wave in Russia —temperatures in July 2010 averaged 14 degrees Fahrenheit above the norm — caused a loss of almost 40 percent of the Russian wheat crop. The severe drought that recently afflicted China, its worst in 60 years, reduced its wheat crop, and, since China has over 20 percent of the world's people, this could cause another major spike in grain prices. Already, almost a billion of the world's people are chronically hungry, and an estimated 20 million people die annually from hunger and its effects worldwide. Unfortunately, while there will be some years when there will be improvements, meeting the food needs of the world's people consistently will become increasingly difficult. Demand is expected to increase because of rising population, because many more people will be eating more animal products which require the extremely inefficient feeding of grain to livestock (on average it takes about eight pounds of grain to produce one pound of beef), and because of the increasing use of corn for ethanol. And the production of grain is likely to decline because of the effects of climate change — droughts, floods, crop-withering heat waves, melting glaciers, and shrinking aquifers — and due to the conversion of farmland to other uses.
- **Running out of water.** The world is also experiencing increasing water shortages. As mentioned above, climate change is causing severe droughts in many parts of the world, even as it is causing flooding in other areas. Trying to grow adequate food for the world's increasing population (and the growing appetite for water-intensive meat production in the developing world) through irrigation of

feed crops is causing aquifers to shrink in many countries, and some may soon be completely depleted. In addition, because of global warming, glaciers that provide replenishing water to rivers in the spring are receding rapidly. Already about one-sixth of the world's people lack access to safe drinking water. And the worldwide demand for water is rapidly increasing.

- **The energy crisis.** There are also many problems related to humanity's ability to produce enough energy to meet future needs, without destroying ourselves in the process. Many experts believe we will soon reach a time when affordable oil production will start to decline because it is becoming increasingly difficult to tap the planet's remaining oil reserves without great economic and environmental costs. The recent nuclear disaster in Japan highlights some of the dangers of relying on nuclear power, despite its low carbon footprint. And coal-burning power plants — still the world's major energy source — are a major contributor to planet-heating CO<sub>2</sub>, in addition to pollution that harms human health. It is essential that environmentally sound, renewable sources of energy be developed as soon as possible.
- **Climate wars.** Many military leaders and security experts are increasingly concerned about the national security implications of climate change. In 2007, eleven retired United States generals and admirals issued a report stating that millions of hungry, thirsty, desperate refugees fleeing from droughts, floods, heat waves, storms, wild fires, and other effects of climate change will make instability, violence, terrorism, and war more likely.
- **Other threats.** Unfortunately, there are many other threats to humanity's future. These include: deforestation, desertification, rapid species extinction, pollution, increasing poverty, soaring financial deficits, and the inability of many countries to meet the needs of their people.

All of these threats occurring simultaneously constitute a collective crisis that endangers humanity and all life on the planet. They will be discussed in greater detail, along with potential solutions, in the chapters of this book.

Everything possible must be done to avert the potential catastrophes indicated above. This book argues that the application of Jewish values, such as pursuing justice and peace and working as partners with God in protecting the Earth, can contribute greatly to solving these problems. Fortunately, other religions have similar values, and hopefully others will increase efforts to encourage their co-religionists to apply their religions' values to today's crises.

A main theme of this book is that, in the face of today's urgent problems, Jews must return to our universal Jewish values and to our missions: to be "a light unto the nations," a kingdom of priests and a holy people, descendants of prophets, champions of social justice, eternal protesters against a corrupt, unjust world, dissenters against destructive and unjust systems. Jews must become actively involved in the missions of global survival and Jewish renewal, working for major changes that will lead to a society where there is far less oppression, injustice, violence, hunger, poverty, and alienation.

Unfortunately, as with other religions, there has been too little effort by Jews to apply Jewish values to the many critical problems that threaten the world today. In fact, as discussed in Chapter 1, along with the many positive developments in Jewish life today, there has been a shift by many Jews away from these basic Jewish values just when the world needs them more than ever before.

I believe that it is essential that we begin open dialogues on where Judaism stands today and on where the world is heading. I hope that this book will contribute to and help expand dialogues about Jewish teachings concerning these critically important issues and will play a part in moving our precious planet away from its present perilous path toward one that is more just, humane, and sustainable.

### **For whom is this book intended?**

For Jews who look to Judaism for moral and spiritual



guidance, but who find that contemporary interpretations of our faith traditions do not address the pressing issues of today. For Jews who are seeking a Judaism that will make a difference in responding to the crises of today and will help guide humanity in directions that can bring a more just, compassionate, peaceful, environmentally sustainable future for generations to come. For Jews who recognize that the Jewish calling to be a light unto the nations gives them a special responsibility to live in ways that benefit all of God's creation. And, since other religions have similar problems and concerns, I believe that many non-Jews will also find this book interesting, challenging, informative, and valuable. Several of the commendations (blurbs) presented above are from Christians and one is from a Muslim.

\* \* \*

I have provided sources for quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures and other sacred Jewish writings. However, while giving credit for quotations and ideas, I have generally not given sources for all other information. This is mainly because I think that anyone who wants to check a fact or learn more about a concept or issue can, in this time of extensive use of technology, use an Internet search to get far more information and in many cases additional views about items in this book.

More information about the issues in this book can be found in the books mentioned in the bibliography, including my books *Judaism and Global Survival* and *Judaism and Vegetarianism*. Both of these books are available to read online at [jewishveg.com/Schwartz](http://jewishveg.com/Schwartz) where you can also find over 150 related articles written by me as well as about 25 podcasts of my talks and interviews. These issues are also presented in a documentary called *A Sacred Duty: Applying Jewish Values to Help Heal the World* that I helped produce with multiple-award-winning producer, director, writer, and cinematographer Lionel Friedberg. It can be viewed for free at [www.aSacredDuty.com](http://www.aSacredDuty.com).

If you have specific questions, points of disagreement (or of agreement that you would like to share), suggestions about promoting the ideas in this book or just points you would like to discuss, please contact me at [schwartz@JewishVeg.com](mailto:schwartz@JewishVeg.com). I

welcome your comments and suggestions, especially about how to get dialogues started about the application of Jewish values to current critical issues. Many thanks!

## Acknowledgments

First, I wish to express my thanks to God by reciting the traditional Jewish blessing (*shechiyanu*) pronounced when a person reaches a milestone in life: “Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the universe, Who has kept us alive and sustained us and brought us to this season.”

While I strongly believe that it is essential that the issues discussed in this book be put on the Jewish agenda, I recognize my limitations in presenting this material. Fortunately, I have received input and suggestions from a wide variety of dedicated, extremely knowledgeable individuals.

I especially want to thank Rabbi Yonassan Gershom for his superb contributions. I started this book many years ago, but found it difficult to complete, because much of the material is very controversial and I was not sure how to best convey the ideas. After many unsuccessful attempts to complete the manuscript, I decided to ask Yonassan, a progressive Breslov Hasid, peace activist, and storyteller, to work with me and write the book in dialogue form. We had been sharing ideas on these issues for almost a decade, plus I had been working with Yonassan on several other projects. He was particularly helpful in providing valuable suggestions for my book *Judaism and Vegetarianism*, especially on the kabbalistic concept of raising holy sparks by eating meat. (See Appendix G.) I felt that his mystical, story-telling, Hasidic approach would complement my more factual, statistical approach.

We worked very well together for over a year, and Yonassan added much valuable material and superb editing to the original manuscript. As the project progressed, however, we realized two things: (1) feedback from our preliminary readers indicated that the dialogue mode was not working out as well as we had hoped and (2) we have some disagreements on our writing styles and on how to approach certain issues.

Yonassan eventually decided it was best that he pull back from the project and let me be the primary author, for the good

of the book and for our mutual efforts for *tikkun olam*. Nevertheless, a great deal of his writing from the early dialogues was incorporated verbatim (with his permission) into the present text. (For our dialogue on “Nature Deficit Disorder” from the original project, see Appendix H.) He continued to help me behind the scenes with editing and research, as well as formatting the book for publication. His addition of appropriate photographs, as well as the cover design, added a much-appreciated dimension to the present work.<sup>3</sup> I am extremely grateful for the hundreds of hours that Yonassan put into our collaboration and for his many valuable contributions.

Much of Yonassan’s wisdom — including especially his skill at applying Jewish stories to social action — is reflected in the chapters of this book. I have also included his biographical chapter from the original project (see Appendix B) for the benefit of my readers, because I feel that his life’s journey, so very different from my own (see Appendix A) played a very important role in balancing my more mainstream academic approach. There were many times when his down-to-earth, practical experience with nature, animals, and the outdoors made me stop and think — to the great improvement of the book.

Rabbi Bob Carroll provided many valuable suggestions, although in the end he did not feel he could endorse the book because of political differences and certain material included in the final edit. Ari Knoll was especially generous with his time in providing valuable suggestions for much of the manuscript.

The following people (in alphabetical order) reviewed at least part of the manuscript and made helpful suggestions and/or provided encouragement that spurred me on: Syd Baamel, Patti Breitman, Dan Brook, Karima Bushnell, Aviva Cantor, Robert Cohen, Rina Deych, Lionel Friedberg, Bruce Friedrich, Sally Gladstein, Kris Haley, Susan Harris, Roberta Kalechofsky, Steve Kaufman, David Krantz, Jay Lavine, Mendy Mirocchnik, Vasu Murti, Nina Natelson, Charles Patterson, Norm Phelps, Professor Joe Regenstein, Lewis Regenstein, Stewart Rose, Rabbi David Rosen, David Rosenfeld, Rabbi Simcha Roth, Stephen Schuster, Rabbi Gerry Serotta, Rae Sikora, Rabbi Barry Silver, Professor Alon Tal, Aharon Varady, Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz, and Pauline Dubkin Yearwood.

The reviewers named above do not necessarily agree with everything in this book, nor did I always use their suggestions. Although every one of these people was very helpful in the writing process, I take full responsibility for the final selection of material and interpretations, as well as any errors.

I also want to thank the trainers at the Staten Island Apple Store, especially Shari Gessin and Danielle Malone, for their help with some manuscript formatting issues.

I apologize in advance to any contributors that I might have inadvertently omitted.

I wish to express deep appreciation to my dear wife, Loretta, our children, Susan (and David Kleid), David, and Deborah (and Ariel Gluch), and my grandchildren, Shalom Eliahu, Ayelet Breindel, Avital P'nina, and Michal Na'ama Kleid, and Eliyahu, Ilan Avraham, Yosef, Yael Shachar, Talya Nitzan and Ayala Neta Gluch, for their patience, understanding, and encouragement as I took time away from other responsibilities to gather and write this material.

Finally, I wish to thank in advance everyone who will read this book and send me ideas and suggestions for improvements, so that this book can more effectively help revitalize Judaism and show how the application of Jewish values can help move our endangered planet to a sustainable path.

Richard Schwartz

[WhoStoleMyReligion.com/](http://WhoStoleMyReligion.com/)

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Heschel, *The Earth is the Lord's*, p. 107

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution," an address at the Episcopal National Cathedral, Washington D.C., March 31, 1968.

<sup>3</sup> Inclusion of a particular photograph does not imply that we necessarily agree with or endorse the group or action it portrays. Our intention was to show, through the use of protest signs and action events, a wide diversity of opinions and controversies. It is our hope that these pictures will inspire respectful dialogue and discussion.

## Chapter 1

### Who stole my religion?

*I am a Jew because the faith of Israel [Judaism] demands no abdication of my mind.*

*I am a Jew because the faith of Israel asks every possible sacrifice of my soul.*

*I am a Jew because in all places where there are tears and suffering the Jew weeps.*

*I am a Jew because in every age when the cry of despair is heard the Jew hopes.*

*I am a Jew because the message of Israel is the most ancient and the most modern.*

*I am a Jew because Israel's promise is a universal promise.*

*I am a Jew because for Israel the world is not finished; men will complete it.*

*I am a Jew because for Israel man is not yet fully created; men are creating him.*

*I am a Jew because Israel places man and his unity above nations and above Israel itself.*

*I am a Jew because above man, image of the divine unity, Israel places the unity that is divine.*

—**Edmond Fleg**, “Why I Am a Jew”<sup>1</sup>

I believe fervently in the above sentiments and many other positive aspects about Judaism and am proud to be a Jew. Judaism has wonderful, powerful, universal messages, and applying them is essential to move our precious, yet increasingly threatened planet onto a sustainable path.

I wrote this book to urge Jews to apply basic Jewish teachings at a time when they are needed more than ever before, because of the many tumultuous crises facing humanity and, indeed, all of God’s creatures. By encouraging Jews to apply Judaism’s eternal values to current issues, I hope this book will help revitalize Judaism and will make our religion more attractive to many disaffected Jews.

This is my fourth book, not counting revised editions and shorter booklets, and it has been by far the hardest to complete. I started writing it about ten years ago, and I had many stops and starts along the way before I mustered enough courage and momentum to complete it.

Although I have become increasingly frustrated as many Jews appear to have become passive and/or to have moved toward disturbingly conservative, often non-traditionally-Jewish, positions, I wondered if it would be *chutzpah* to challenge the prevailing views in much of the Jewish community, including sometimes those of members of my own family and of many of my friends and fellow congregants. At a time when the State of Israel is so threatened, antisemitism<sup>2</sup> is increasing in many countries, terrorism is becoming an increasing concern, and Jews (among others) are facing economic and other challenges, would I be worsening the situations?

On the other hand, I thought about the importance of trying to make Jews (and others) more aware of Judaism’s eternal teachings and how essential it is to apply Judaism’s basic values to today’s many crises. And I wanted to try to counteract conservative forces that have been shifting Judaism

away from its historic, progressive roots.

## **A word about my background at my Modern Orthodox synagogue**

I have been a member of a modern Orthodox<sup>3</sup> synagogue since 1968, and I have served as Vice President for Youth, Cultural Director, and co-editor of the synagogue's newsletter. I have seen the dedication of members of my congregation to Judaism and Jewish issues. The amount they donate to charity is truly outstanding. The acts of kindness and concern for the well being of fellow congregants are also remarkable, and there is always great communal sharing at occasions of both joy and sorrow.

Especially commendable are the actions of the voluntary group Hatzolah, whose members will drop whatever they are doing at a moment's notice, whether they are at work, taking part in a Passover Seder, or just relaxing with their families or friends, to respond to medical emergencies. Many synagogue members make weekly visits to patients in hospitals and nursing homes. Many of the synagogue's young people work with great compassion and dedication at special summer camps, taking care of children with cancer and other health problems.

The commitment of my synagogue community to learning and to prayer is also outstanding. There are well-attended classes and *minyanim* (prayer services) throughout the week, and often there are scholars in residence on Shabbat and guest speakers during the week who enlighten the members on a variety of issues. This is typical of other Orthodox synagogues throughout the United States and in other countries.

There are also many positive things happening in the wider Jewish community. Appendix E provides information about many Jewish groups that are applying Jewish values to environmental, human rights, social justice, and peace issues. Appendix D focuses specifically on Orthodox groups working on such issues.

## **Why I believe my religion has been stolen**

Despite all the positive religious activities mentioned above and more, I think that my religion has been stolen. Why? It is largely because many in the Orthodox community — the group of Jews most involved in Jewish religious practice, the group most steeped in Jewish learning and observance, the group that is growing most rapidly and having a major impact in the Jewish world and on the outside society, the group of Jews with whom I am most involved — has, I believe, gone astray by not adequately applying our traditional Jewish values to the critical issues facing the world today. Instead, there has been a major shift, primarily among Orthodox Jews, towards support of very conservative policies and a Republican Party in the U.S. that puts a priority on helping corporations and wealthy people rather than the majority of people.

A few clarifications: I am mainly focusing in this book on Orthodox Jews for the reasons indicated above, but of course they are not the only ones failing to adequately address current threats. Other Jews and people of other religions, as well as secularists, should also do far more to address current challenges. Rabbi Michael Lerner (not Orthodox) writes in his new 2011 book, *Embracing Israel/Palestine: A Strategy to Heal and Transform the Middle East*:

To those readers who are Jewish, my message is simple: we need to reclaim Judaism from the hands of those who have mistakenly identified it with policies of ultra-nationalism, fundamentalism, and ethnic chauvinism ... [from what] is actually an unconscious rebellion against God and that which has been most sacred and valuable about the Jewish tradition, led by people who go through all the motions of a religious life but who have totally abandoned a belief that the world could actually be based on central principles of Judaism like “love your neighbor,” “love the stranger,” or “justice, justice shalt thou pursue.” Young Jews whom I meet when I am invited to speak on college campuses often tell me they want nothing to do with



Judaism because they have been told by parents, teachers at their religious school, or by leaders of the Jewish community that to be a “good Jew” one must support the current policies of the state of Israel. Many respond in their hearts by saying, “If this is a precondition for being Jewish, I can’t be Jewish anymore.”

Yet I know that there is a very different path to being Jewish, a path that embraces love, kindness, and a generosity of spirit. That path is an alternative that could save Judaism and the Jewish people from the damage being done by those who have hijacked our religion and turned it into a public relations arm of a particular government of the state of Israel.

However, I did not write this book only for Jews. I’ve met many Christians and Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists who have watched with pain as their own religions have been hijacked by the chauvinists, fundamentalists, and nationalists as well. And I know many secular humanists – people who reject religion as the basis for morality and espouse a philosophy based on human reason and ethical justice — who have watched with great pain as the best ideals of democracy and human rights have been appropriated by powerful elites to justify global imperialism and the domination of others.<sup>4</sup>

As I explain in chapter 5, as well as other places throughout the book, I am a strong supporter of Israel and proud to call myself a Jew. Nevertheless, this “hijacking” of religion by right-wing politics is my concern also. I seek to re-awaken the spirit of the prophets of old in the Judaism of today. Appendices D and E provide role models of Orthodox and other Jewish groups that are doing many positive things to improve the world, but far more needs to be done at this critical time. I wish to clarify that while I might not agree 100% with everything each of these groups stands for (in many cases they don’t even agree with each other), I do believe it is imperative that we examine the issues from many different perspectives and not get locked into one “party line” or another.

Recognizing my own limitations, I am reluctant to be

critical of others, but I feel some respectful criticism is called for in an effort to try to start meaningful dialogues that will help galvanize Jews and others to actively confront the major crises mentioned in the preface. I strongly believe the fate of humanity is at stake now and everything possible must be done to improve the situation.

## **The shift of Orthodox Jews to the Right politically**

In the 2008 U.S. election, while about 78 percent of Jews voted for Barack Obama, roughly that same percentage of Orthodox Jews voted for the Republican candidate John McCain. This vote by Orthodox Jews was despite the horrendous condition the Bush administration left the country in, with the United States on the brink of a financial depression, and the fact that strong opposition from conservative Republicans forced McCain to drop his plans to choose Jewish Senator Joseph Lieberman as his running mate. This led to McCain picking the unqualified, untested, and very conservative Sarah Palin to be potentially one heartbeat away from the U.S. presidency, under an aging president with a history of heart problems.

As further proof of the political shift, consider these results from exit polls during the 2010 U. S. midterm elections:<sup>5</sup> Jewish voters voted for Democrats for Congress over Republicans on November 2, 2010 by a margin of 66% to 31%, or more than two-to-one, according to an election-night exit poll conducted by the progressive group J Street. Reform and Conservative Jews supported the Democrats far more than Orthodox Jews. Nationwide, J Street's polling numbers show that Democrats won among Reform Jews by 72% to 24% and among Conservative Jews by 58% to 39%, but lost the Orthodox Jewish vote by 53% to 44%.

In some races, there was an even greater gap. In New York's 4th congressional district on Long Island, Democratic incumbent Carolyn McCarthy bested Republican Fran Becker among Jewish voters by about two to one, according to a Republican Jewish Committee survey. McCarthy won Reform Jewish voters by 80% to 11% and Conservative Jewish voters by 61% to 21%. Among Orthodox Jewish voters, however, she lost by a lopsided 64% to 15%. Similar results occurred in

other races.

A personal experience reinforced my perception that Orthodox Jews increasingly support conservative candidates and positions. During the primary election in my district for the Republican nomination for Congress in 2010, a Republican candidate spoke at my synagogue after a Shabbat afternoon service. During the question period following the talk, I asked the candidate what policies he supported other than those of the Bush administration that had proved so disastrous and left the country in great economic peril. One member of the congregation applauded my question. When the candidate said to the applauder, “Oh, you liked that question,” another congregation member called out, “They are the only two liberals in the synagogue.” This was, of course, an exaggeration, but not by much, based on my many experiences and conversations with synagogue members.

Another indication that Orthodox Jews have moved to the right is the large readership in that community of the conservative *Jewish Press*, (which claims to be “the largest independent weekly Jewish newspaper in the United States.”) Its editorials and articles generally support conservative political positions. Other Jewish periodicals read by many Orthodox Jews are also generally very politically conservative.

One factor that impelled me to continue working on this book was an article by a *Jewish Press* columnist calling environmental activists “tikkun olam pagans.”<sup>6</sup> He openly ridiculed Jews who apply the term *tikkun olam* (“repairing the world”) to ecology and social action. When I challenged him in a letter to the editor, several readers defended his reactionary stance.

The article’s position is inconsistent with that of contributors to the “Orthodox Forum Series” volume, *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*, who clearly apply *tikkun olam* to social issues. The book cites many distinguished Orthodox rabbis, including Samson Raphael Hirsch, Abraham Isaac Kook, Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, all of whom stress that Jews have a religious and ethical responsibility to work with others to promote the welfare of society. In his anthology, *Compassion for Humanity in the Jewish Tradition*, Rabbi Dovid Sears, a Breslov Hasid, discusses numerous source texts that indicate

our responsibility for working to benefit all people. The phrase *tikkun olam* is not an invention of the modern liberal mind, but occurs many times in the *Mishnah* and later rabbinic literature.<sup>7</sup>

Since I am being especially critical of Orthodox Jews in this chapter, I want to emphasize again that there are many Orthodox Jewish groups who are doing wonderful work in terms of charity, kindness, and, in general, working for a better world (See Appendix D). I had also planned to include a list of Orthodox Jewish individuals who are actively involved in improving the world, but my research showed that the number of such Jews is so large, and their many activities so valuable and varied, that a good-sized book would be necessary to do them justice. Even then many worthy Orthodox activists would be inadvertently omitted, as would some valuable activities of activists that were included.

### **Why the shift to the present very conservative Republican Party is a problem**

The recent shift of many Jews, especially among the Orthodox, to the Republican Party stands in sharp contrast to a long history of Jewish support for the Democratic Party. Of course, Orthodox Jews, like everyone else, are entitled to support any politicians of their choice. And certainly there are problems with the Democratic Party, some of whose members also receive large contributions from highly profitable corporations that have spent billions of dollars in pursuit of “the best Congress that money can buy.” Democratic platforms are no substitute for basic Jewish values, and I certainly don’t agree with everything that Democrats advocate. But I wonder how the Republican philosophy, which has generally opposed Social Security, Medicare, workers’ compensation, and other benefits that society now takes for granted, can be reconciled with Jewish teachings about concern for the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan and about working for a more compassionate, just, and peaceful world. In my opinion, they *cannot* be reconciled.

Some might respond, “Yes, these goals are important to me, but the government should not be involved in implementing them — they should be left to individual initiatives and charity groups.” Certainly these efforts are important and must be

supported and encouraged, but considering the magnitude of the problems, including increasing poverty, unemployment, and homelessness, and the resulting physical and emotional problems, private efforts cannot be enough. The U.S. Constitution states that one of the functions of government is to promote the general welfare of the citizens.

Judaism absolutely sees taking care of the poor and powerless as being communal and societal responsibilities. The Talmud and codes give broad authority to communal bodies to tax, regulate, and redistribute income.<sup>8</sup>

I know that many Orthodox Jewish and (other Republican) supporters are intelligent, sensitive, and caring people, but I respectfully wonder how they can support the Republican Party in view of the following examples, more of which can often be found in news reports:

- Today's Republican Party has very few moderates like Nelson Rockefeller, Jacob Javits, John Heinz, Mark Hatfield, and Clifford Case, and the Tea Party's increasing involvement is shifting the Party even further to the Right.
- There are currently no Republican Jewish senators (the Democrats have 13) and only one Jewish congressman, Eric Cantor (compared to 27 for the Democrats.)
- The positions of today's Republican Party are generally consistent with the extreme, intolerant views of commentators like Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, and Sean Hannity, people who often deny realities (like human-caused climate change) to favor conservative interests, and who sometimes assert weird, marginal claims and accusations.
- Current Republican leaders propose policies similar to or worse than those of the Republican George W. Bush administration, which converted a three-year budget surplus, on track to completely eliminate the federal debt, into a major deficit, created very few net jobs (none in the private sector), and left the economy in a major downward-spiraling economic freefall, with over 700,000 jobs per month being

lost.

- Republicans have been doing everything possible to keep the Obama administration from pulling the country out of these terrible economic conditions, often voting against and filibustering legislation they had previously supported and sometime co-sponsored, in attempting to undermine the president and regain power.
- During President Obama's first two years, Republican legislators voted against providing funds to save jobs of teachers, police officers and fire fighters, continuing unemployment benefits to long-time unemployed people, and providing medical benefits to 9/11 responders. Every Republican senator joined in filibustering similar legislation in October 2011.
- Republicans generally support the wealthy and corporations, rather than middle class and poor people.
- Republican senators were so committed to helping the wealthy that on December 1, 2010, all 42 Republican senators signed a letter indicating that they would block ALL pending legislation, unless the Senate also approved continuing all Bush-era tax cuts, including those for the wealthiest two percent of Americans. These continued tax breaks for these wealthiest Americans, who have prospered greatly in the past ten years while the United States poverty rate has greatly increased, would increase the national debt by \$700 billion if continued for a decade. This would come at a time when major budget deficits at all levels of government are necessitating major cutbacks in essential services, including many that directly affect the Jewish community.
- Republicans support gutting regulations that constrain Wall Street, crippling rules that promote worker safety and health, eliminating the minimum wage, repealing the new Obama health-care law, cutting back Medicare and Social Security, reducing or eliminating corporate taxes, and, in

general, moving the nation back to the bad old pre-New Deal days.

- Republicans oppose efforts to improve the nation's infrastructure despite the fact that the American Society of Civil Engineers gives the U. S. infrastructure a grade of D, and also oppose efforts to improve our educational system and research capacities and develop renewable energy sources. These activities would create many new jobs, bring in additional tax revenues, and help end the current severe economic conditions, as well as save lives, improve the environment, and prepare the country for a far brighter future. Instead, Republicans insist on slashing the federal budget.
- All but four Republican members of the House of Representatives voted to support the budget proposal of Congressman Paul Ryan, which would end Medicare as we know it and would make major cuts to programs, most of which serve modest and low-income people, while giving additional tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans and the largest corporations. If that budget was adopted, it would result in the loss of up to 700,000 jobs; a weakened Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), that would not be able to effectively enforce the Clean Air Act and protect the environment in other ways; cuts in community health centers, which would deprive millions of poor people from receiving adequate health care; and reduced food and health care assistance to children, pregnant women, and new mothers. The Republican proposed budget would also severely cut funding for family planning, Head Start; public radio and TV, the National Institute of Health; and housing vouchers for veterans. At a time when middle class Americans are already suffering greatly, these cuts would make their situations far worse. In summary, instead of winning the future with programs that will benefit all Americans, the Republican budget proposals would help propel us toward third world status.
- In the summer of 2011, Republicans used the threat of a government default to hold the Congress hostage in order to

force major cuts in essential programs, while making sure that there would be absolutely no tax increases for the wealthiest Americans or repeal of tax breaks for highly profitable corporations.

- A further example of how far to the right the Republican party has moved are some statements and actions of Republican politicians in the summer of 2011. Rick Perry said that Social Security is a “Ponzi scheme” and a “monstrous lie.” Michele Bachmann joked that God sent Hurricane Irene to warn against federal spending. Eric Cantor argued that any disaster relief to help Hurricane Irene victims must be offset with other spending cuts. In a debate in August 2011, all eight Republican candidates for president agreed that they would not raise taxes on the wealthiest Americans, even if it meant that there would be ten dollars of cuts that they supported for every dollar of increased tax revenue.
- At a debate co-sponsored by the Tea Party on September 7, 2011. Republican presidential candidate Ron Paul was asked if a 30-year-old man who decided not to buy health insurance because he felt he was healthy and did not need to suddenly became very sick should be allowed to just die. Tea party supporters in the audience shouted out “Yes!” and cheered. This is certainly far from Torah values.

In view of the above and more, I would like to respectfully address the following questions to Jews who support the Republican Party:

- Are Jewish values of compassion, justice, environmental sustainability, and concern for the poor consistent with a Republican Party that seems mainly concerned with helping the wealthy become even wealthier beyond any need or reason, at the expense of the poor and the middle class, and with fighting to relieve corporations of legal accountability and social responsibility through deregulation?
- Is support for politicians who want to cut social services



while keeping tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans consistent with Jewish teachings on caring for the most vulnerable members of society?

Some may feel that I am too harsh on Republicans, but please consider the following words of the prophet Isaiah:

Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches? (Isaiah 10:1-3)

### **Denial on climate change and other environmental issues**

Another important reason I believe my religion has been stolen is the widespread denial by so many Jews, especially Orthodox Jews, about climate change, at a time when Jews should be leading efforts to work toward stabilizing the world's climate. In an attempt to start a respectful dialogue, I hope Jews and others who are skeptical about climate change will consider the following:

- A strong consensus exists among climate scientists that the world is rapidly approaching a climate catastrophe largely caused by human activities, as indicated by hundreds of peer-reviewed articles in respected scientific journals and from dire warnings by science academies worldwide.
- Record heat waves, severe droughts, damaging storms, unprecedented floods, major wild fires, and other extreme weather events long predicted by the much-maligned climate science consensus continue to increase in frequency and/or intensity as the planet heats up. The summer of 2011 was especially severe as many temperature records were broken, much of the southern U.S. had extremely severe droughts, and hurricane Irene caused major flooding in

several states on the east coast of the United States.

- In the spring of 2011, there was major flooding of many areas along the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, and severe droughts in several states.
- Some climate scientists, including one of the world's preeminent climatologists, Dr. James Hansen, Director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, warn that climate change could reach a tipping point and spiral out of control within a few years, with disastrous, irreversible consequences, unless we act rapidly to reduce our greenhouse gas emitting activities.
- Recent warnings by many military leaders, including eleven retired United States generals and admirals in a 2007 report indicated that climate change makes instability, violence, terrorism and war more likely, as millions of hungry, thirsty, desperate people ("climate refugees") flee from floods, storms, droughts, wildfires and other effects of climate change.
- The many positive side effects of working to reduce climate change include a less-polluted world, lessened dependence for oil on foreign countries (some of whom are leading supporters of terrorism), healthier people, new business opportunities, and the timely creation of a 21st century "green collar" workforce at a time of high unemployment. One recent cartoon put it ironically well, portraying a climate skeptic say, "What if [climate change] is a big hoax and we create a better world for nothing?"
- One has a choice of believing mostly ideology- and industry-driven "skeptics," with little or no relevant scientific background, or the true experts: climate scientists and the world's official scientific bodies, informed by the overwhelming cumulative weight of research and empirical evidence dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century — in other words, the simplistic rhetoric of misinformed conservative pundits or the sober consensus of the world's leading scientists.

## **Climate change and other environmental threats to Israel**

What makes the inadequate response of the Jewish community, especially that of the Orthodox, to climate change and other environmental problems even more disturbing is the fact that Israel, like most other countries, is already suffering from the effects of climate change. The warmest year in Israel's history was 2010, a year in which Israel experienced many major heat waves. In 2011 Israel was in the seventh year of the worst drought in her history. Israel experienced the worst forest fire in her existence in December 2010, a fire made far worse because of the very dry conditions due to the lack of rain.

Israeli climatic conditions are likely to get much worse. The Israel Union for Environmental Defense (IUED, or *Adam, Teva v'Din*, in Hebrew) projected in 2007 that global warming will cause Israel to suffer from many additional severe heat waves, with an average temperature increase of from 2 to 11 degrees Fahrenheit, an average decrease of precipitation of 20–30 percent, major storms, an inundation of the coastal plain where most Israelis live caused by a rising Mediterranean Sea, increased desertification, and other severely negative effects of climate change.

## **Should Jews support Republicans who are in denial about the environment and climate change?**

In view of the fact that, as indicated in Chapter 10, Judaism has very powerful teachings about environmental sustainability, and considering the climate threats mentioned above, I find it very difficult to understand how some Jews can ignore the reality that the Republican Party is so out of touch with current environmental issues. Following are a sampling of the many examples that illustrate the negative approach of most conservatives about climate change and other environmental threats:

- The Center for American Progress reviewed statements by Republican candidates vying for the 37 Senate seats in 2010 races and concluded that “remarkably,” only one

candidate “supports climate action.” That person, U.S. Representative Mike Castle, lost a primary race for the Republican nomination for Delaware’s open Senate seat to climate change-denier Christine O’Donnell.

- “Republicans for Environmental Protection” is a wonderful group that works to get Republicans to support positive environmental legislation. Because so many Republican politicians are in denial about climate change and other environmental issues, however, the group only endorsed 19 Republicans (less than four percent) out of almost 500 candidates for Congress and governorships in the 2010-midterm U.S. elections.
- Under pressure from the Tea Party, the Republican-led House of Representatives mounted a major assault in 2011 on public health and a clean environment. Republicans in the House Energy Committee voted unanimously three times to deny the existence of climate change. Several Republican freshmen support abolishing the Environmental Protection Agency. All House Republicans voted against eliminating taxpayer-funded subsidies for big oil companies, even though that would have saved the federal government tens of billions of dollars.
- Two of the top contenders for the chairmanship of the House Energy and Commerce Committee in the 2011 congress were Congressman Joe Barton, who apologized to BP for the U.S. government forcing the company to pay for the massive oil spill caused mainly by their negligence, and Congressman John Shimkus, who says that we need not be concerned about climate change because the Bible tells us that, after the great flood in the time of Noah, God promised never to destroy the world with a flood again. However, God did *not* promise that human activities would not result in severe storms, droughts, heat waves, and wildfires, as well as floods that could destroy the world as we know it.
- Fortunately, neither Barton nor Shimkus was elected, but the new committee chairman, Rep. Fred Upton (R-MI), is

far from an environmental activist. He questions the science of manmade climate change and has used his committee chairmanship to try to discredit respected climate scientists. He also hired many staff members who were lobbyists from the coal, oil, and other energy industries.

- On April 7, 2011, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives passed what environmentalists consider a so-called “Dirty Air Act,” an extreme bill supported by the coal and oil industries, which would permanently strip the Environmental Protection Agency of its ability to hold polluters accountable under the Clean Air Act. The bill would prevent the EPA from reducing carbon dioxide and other global warming pollutants from coal-fired power plants, oil refineries and other industrial sources; would overturn the EPA’s scientific determination that global warming pollution poses threats to public health and welfare, which means that Congress believes it knows climate science better than climate scientists; and would prevent the EPA — and the individual states — from issuing new standards for cleaner vehicles after 2017. Fortunately, the bill did not pass the Senate, as it would have likely resulted in many additional deaths and illnesses from air pollution.

When I talk to members of my synagogue about climate change and other environmental threats, many deny there is a problem or tell me that God or a future Messiah will take care of the threat. Perhaps they should consider the following story:

A man’s house was caught in a big flood, but when the order to evacuate came, he refused. “Don’t worry about me,” he said, “I’ll be safe. God will protect me.”

The floodwaters rose higher and higher, eventually forcing him climb up to the roof. But still he kept turning down the rescuers who came — first in a rowboat, then a motorboat, and finally a helicopter. Each time the man told them, “No thank you, I’m just fine here, God will save me.” But the waters rushed over the roof and he drowned.

When he got to the Next World, he asked God, “How could you abandon me like that? How could you let this happen to such a pious person as me?” And God replied, “What more did you want? I sent two boats and a helicopter.”

Jews are not supposed to rely on miracles. A good approach I once read in a collection of statements given out in a synagogue for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur suggested that we should pray as if everything depends on God, and act as if everything depends on us. The key point here is that because of increasing evidence that the world is rapidly approaching an unprecedented climate catastrophe and faces many other environmental crises, it is extremely urgent that the Jewish community play a leading role in responding to these threats.

Since I have been especially critical of the lack of involvement of Orthodox Jews in responding to environmental threats, I would like to stress that there are also Orthodox Jews who are actively working for a better environment. Especially noteworthy is the Orthodox group *Canfei Nesharim* (Wings of Eagles), which organizes events, produces considerable literature, and manages an excellent website to increase awareness of Torah teachings on environmental sustainability. More information about them and other similar groups is in Appendix D.

## **How support for Israel is related to the above issues**

As discussed in Chapter 6, I am a strong supporter of Israel. My wife and I visit family members there at least twice a year. Having a grandson in the Israeli Defense Forces and other grandchildren who will soon be old enough to join the IDF, I pray especially hard for peace in Israel. I feel that the best way to support Israel is to promote a peaceful resolution of conflicts between Israel and its neighbors, while recognizing the many difficulties in bringing this about.

Along with most Jews, members of my modern Orthodox congregation and other Orthodox Jews are strong supporters of Israel. A major reason they support Republican politicians is that they consider these politicians to be fervent backers of Israel, which they often define as supporting extremely hawkish

positions. They frequently disregard politicians' positions on economic, environmental, and social issues. Fellow congregants have often told me that the only issue they care about is Israel. Many of my co-congregants and other Orthodox Jews support conservative Republicans because these politicians will support hawkish Israeli policies, even though they might be counterproductive to the peace process and to other Israeli and American interests.

These Jews ignore the statements by the Bush administration in its final year about the need for a two-state solution, the very same policy they now oppose Obama for. If you are a Republican leader, it seems you are given a free pass on such blatant inconsistencies. They also fail to consider that Israel urgently needs peace to avoid another intifada or war, halt her increasing isolation, help address her many economic, environmental, and other domestic problems, and remain both a Jewish and a democratic state. Israel's need to be constantly on the alert for possible terrorist acts and war makes it very difficult to meet her domestic needs and threatens her future economic well being.

**Bottom line: a politician can be a denier of climate change and can support reactionary social and economic positions, but can still gain support from many U.S. Jews if his or her position on Israel is in support of Israeli hard-liners.**

Larry Derfner's July 7, 2010 *Jerusalem Post* article, "Israel is waiting for Palin," indicates that many Israelis feel that Israel would benefit from the Republican Party's return to power and are arguing — absurdly — that "you're for Israel or you're for the Democrats, you can't be both." Since when does a person's political party define whether or not one supports Israel? Years ago, such a claim would have been unheard of. In any case, are the Republicans *really* that good for Israel?

Evidently, many Israelis are ignoring (or simply do not care at all about) reactionary and/or outdated Republican positions on the environment, health care, education, helping the poor, and other domestic issues. Their position is largely based on a belief that a president who doesn't push Israel to make any concessions for peace is the best president for Israel. They fail to recognize that Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran all became significantly stronger during the eight years of the

George W. Bush administration's mainly hands-off policies concerning Israel.

It is also important to consider that the current budget cutting frenzy that Republicans, especially Tea Party politicians, are pushing may have a major negative impact on foreign aid for allies, including Israel. According to many economists, such cuts will harm the U.S. economy, possibly making it more difficult for the U.S. to support Israel during difficult economic times.

Here, too, I want to stress that there are Orthodox individual Jews and groups that are actively involved in pursuing a two-state solution of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. One such group, Oz v'Shalom/Netivot Shalom, will be discussed in Chapter 6.

### **Anti-Obama attitudes of many religious Jews**

Many Israelis and hawkish American Jews, especially among the Orthodox, have very negative views about President Obama. Of course, like previous presidents, he has been far from perfect in trying to deal with some very complex problems. However, for people who see his record as extremely negative, especially with regard to Israel, here are some points to consider:

- Despite the many hateful messages disseminated widely by email and the falsehoods spread by some in the media, it is important to recognize that Obama was born in the United States and that he is not a Muslim. It is sad and a bit crazy to have to make such a statement, but poll results show that many people, especially Republicans, are skeptical of these facts, even after Obama and the state of Hawaii presented his official birth certificate. Of course, this is not to imply that Muslims should not be considered as possible presidential candidates. A person's qualifications, not his or her religion, should be the determining factor, and the U.S. Constitution bars any religious test for office.
- People who think President Obama has a negative attitude toward Jews or that he is more sensitive to Muslims than Jews should consider the following: his initial chief of staff Rahm Emanuel was Jewish and the son of Israelis; one of



his key advisors David Axelrod, is Jewish, and he is also a key strategist for Obama's reelection campaign; Obama nominated a Jew, Elena Kagan, as a Supreme Court Justice (even though that left the 9-member Court with three Jews and no Protestant members; all the Jewish members of the Supreme Court in the past 80 years were appointed by Democratic presidents); he is the first president to have Passover Seders in the White House; he has had Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the White House far more often than any other world leader (seven times by May 2011); Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have stated many times that the U.S. has been extremely cooperative in meeting Israel's security needs; and Obama and his cabinet members have frequently stressed their solidarity with Jews and with Israel.

- The president has taken many positive actions for Israel and for Judaism, including: rejecting the Goldstone report that criticized Israeli actions in the war in Gaza; asking Congress to approve a \$205 million package to help Israel build a new anti-missile defense system; successfully advocating for Israel's admission into the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development; giving a speech in the heart of the Arab world, in which he told his listeners that they need to recognize the legitimacy of a Jewish state; stating to the UN General Assembly clearly and unequivocally that "Israel is a sovereign state and the historic homeland of the Jewish people" and "It should be clear to all that efforts to chip away at Israel's legitimacy will only be met by the unshakeable opposition of the US;" and signing an executive order that preserved the faith-based social service funding initiative. These points and more appears in an article "Our-Not-So Humble Opinions" in the December 15, 2010 issue of *Ami Magazine*, by Rabbi Avi Shafran, a self-described lifelong Republican, who adds, "It bothers me that Mr. Obama is negatively viewed by so many Orthodox Jews, ostensibly because he treats Israel badly and is hostile to religion." He isn't!
- Another example of Obama's strong support for Israel is his very positive response to a frantic, middle-of-the-night call

from Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu that helped free six Israelis who were trapped in the Israeli embassy in Cairo that was under attack by militant Egyptians. After they were freed, Netanyahu said:

I would like to express my gratitude to the President of the United States, Barack Obama. I asked for his help. This was a decisive and fateful moment. He said, "I will do everything I can." And so he did. He used every considerable means and influence of the United States to help us. We owe him a special measure of gratitude. This attests to the strong alliance between Israel and the United States.

Former Mossad Director Efraim Halevy also commented on Obama's help in this crisis:

I believe the leadership that the President of the United States showed on that night was a leadership of historic dimensions. It was he who took the ultimate decision that night which prevented what could have been a sad outcome -- instead of six men coming home, the arrival in Israel of six body bags.

*Hamodia*, the nation's only Orthodox Jewish daily paper, editorialized: "He [Obama] merited to be *Hashem's* [God's] instrument of salvation. The Jewish community all over the world offers him our heartfelt thanks."

- On September 22, 2011, Prime Minister Netanyahu heaped additional praise on President Obama for his talk at the United Nations, in which Obama expressed opposition to U.N. recognition of a Palestinian state, and indicated that he would veto a resolution supporting that recognition in the U.N. Security Council. Netanyahu indicated that Obama deserved a "badge of honor" for that talk.
- It is in America's strategic interest to seek a just, comprehensive, sustainable resolution of the Middle East conflicts and therefore Obama is justified in pursuing that aim, as have all United States presidents in the past 50

years.

- All recent United States presidents sought an end to Israeli settlement expansion and a two-state solution to the conflict.
- President Obama's and other Democrats' positions on economic, environmental and other domestic issues are more consistent with Jewish values than the positions of Republicans.
- Most Democratic politicians have been strong supporters of Israel for many years.
- Consistent with the fact that there are fierce debates about security issues in Israel, someone can be a strong supporter of Israel and still disagree with policies of the Israeli government.

Long-time Orthodox commentator Marvin Schick reinforced many of the arguments in this chapter in his article "Right Is Not Right" in the January 21, 2010 issue of the *New York Jewish Week*. He sharply criticized the viciousness directed against President Obama by many Orthodox Jews who are "in bed with the far right" in an "unholy alliance" which "means that unbeknownst to them, they are in bed with tens of thousands of crazies, anti-Semites, and outright Nazi lovers." Schick concluded:

There is no precedent, whether in the European experience or Israel, for the nasty political and ideological writing that has become standard fare in U.S. fervently Orthodox publications, particularly the stream of vituperation directed against the Obama administration and the collateral adoption of far right positions...

I believe that the embrace of right-wing attitudes is a factor in the high rate of attrition among younger Orthodox, a rate that dwarfs any gains achieved through outreach... In view of the still too recent history of persecution and genocide, how can any who

are Orthodox have a comfort level with the far right? The answer appears to be that Rush Limbaugh, Sarah Palin and other right-wingers have become their ideological guides. This needs to be challenged.

Indeed it should be challenged. Our moral and ethical guides should be Moses and the Prophets, not conservatives like Limbaugh and Palin. In the next chapter, we will explore how our Jewish leaders of old responded to social injustices.

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### Notes for Chapter 1

- <sup>1</sup> Edmond Fleg (1874-1963) was a French essayist, playwright, and poet, whose main writings deal with Judaism and the Jewish people.
- <sup>2</sup> I prefer this more modern spelling as a technical term, rather than the 19<sup>th</sup>-century spelling “anti-Semitism.” The distinguished scholar of the Holocaust and other fields, Emil Fackenheim, also preferred to spell it “antisemitism,” to make it clear that there is no entity called “Semitism” to be opposed to.
- <sup>3</sup> Modern Orthodox Judaism attempts to combine traditional practices and values with the modern, secular world.
- <sup>4</sup> Michael Lerner, *Embracing Israel/Palestine: A Strategy to Heal and Reform the Middle East*, Tikkun Books, San Francisco, 2011, pp. 11,12.
- <sup>5</sup> The poll results given are from an article by J. J. Goldberg in the November 19, 2010 issue of the *Jewish Forward*, “Jewish Voters, Obama and the Great Elephant Hunt.”
- <sup>6</sup> “The Rise of Tikkun Olam Paganism,” *Jewish Press*. January 23, 2003, [http://www.jewishpress.com/pageroute.do/14598/The\\_Rise\\_Of\\_Tikkun\\_O.html](http://www.jewishpress.com/pageroute.do/14598/The_Rise_Of_Tikkun_O.html)
- <sup>7</sup> “The History of ‘Tikkun Olam,’” Rabbi Jill Jacobs, Zeek, June, 2007, [http://www.jewishjustice.org/download/section42/The\\_History\\_of\\_Tikkun\\_Olam\\_ZEEK.pdf](http://www.jewishjustice.org/download/section42/The_History_of_Tikkun_Olam_ZEEK.pdf)
- <sup>8</sup> There is much in the writings of Rabbi Aaron Levine and Dr. Meir Tamari on Jewish teachings on economic issues. Please see bibliography.



President Obama and guests at the third White House Passover Seder in 2011. The Obama Seder tradition began during his 2008 campaign, and he later became the first US president to hold Seders at the White House.



Members of the ultra-conservative Tea Party rally against the 2010 health care bill in St. Paul, Minnesota. At similar rallies across the nation there were signs claiming that Obama was not born in America, that "Jesus is Lord, not Allah," that the health care bill includes "death panels" for denying care to the elderly, and that "Obamacare is Obamafascism." Can Jews continue to support a Republican Party that has shifted so far to the Right?

## Chapter 2

### Is Judaism a radical religion?

*There are no words in the world more knowing, more disclosing, and more indispensable. Words both stern and graceful, heart-rending and healing. A truth so universal— Elohim [God] is One. A thought so consoling — He is with us in distress. A responsibility so overwhelming — His Name can be desecrated. A map of time — from creation to redemption. Guideposts along the way: The Seventh Day; An offering — contrition of the heart. A utopia — would that all people were prophets. The insight — man lives by his faithfulness, his home is in time, and his substance in deeds. A standard so bold — ye shall be holy. A commandment so daring — love thy neighbor as thyself. A fact so sublime — human and divine pathos can be in accord. And a gift so undeserved — the ability to repent.*

— Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel<sup>1</sup>

Based on the very powerful quote above by Rabbi Heschel, and so much more in the Jewish tradition, I believe that Judaism *is* a radical religion. However, most Jews nowadays would probably disagree with this assertion. Even the word “liberal” has become a negative word for some Jews. So I think it’s important to explore why applying basic Jewish values and teachings could revolutionize the world.

## **Judaism’s radical history**

From its beginning, Judaism has often protested against greed, injustice, and the misuse of power. Abraham, the first Hebrew, smashed the idols of his father even though his action challenged the common belief of the time. He established the precedent that a Jew should not conform to society’s values when they are evil. Later he even challenged God, exclaiming, “Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justly?” when God informed him of His plans to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:25). By contrast, Noah, though personally righteous, was later rebuked by some Talmudic sages because he failed to criticize the immorality of the society around him.

At the beginning of the book of Exodus, the Torah relates three incidents in Moses’ life before God chose him to deliver the Israelites from Egypt. They teach that Jews must be involved in fighting injustice and helping to resolve disputes, whether they are between Jews, Jews and non-Jews, or only non-Jews.

On the first day that Moses goes out to his people from the palace of Pharaoh in which he was raised, he rushes to defend a Hebrew against an Egyptian aggressor (Exodus 2:11-12). When Moses next goes out, he defends a Jew being beaten by another Jew (Exodus 2:13). Later, after being forced to flee from Egypt and arriving at a well in Midian, Moses comes to the aid of the shepherd daughters of Jethro who were being harassed by other shepherds (Exodus 2:17). In all three cases, Moses pursues justice, no matter who the victims are or what group they belong to. One could argue that it was these three actions that demonstrated to God that Moses was the right person to



confront Pharaoh and later lead the Israelites out of Egypt.

The story of Moses has become an archetypal model for liberation movements today. This is a great gift from the Jewish people to the world. When Dr. Martin Luther King said to a gathering of civil rights activists in Memphis, Tennessee on April 3, 1968, the night before he was assassinated, "I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land," he was evoking the eternal story of Moses as a model for the United States civil rights movement. Like Moses, Dr. King was confronting the Pharaoh of his own day with "Let my people go!"

Balaam, the biblical pagan prophet, intended to curse Israel, but ended up blessing them instead. He described the role of the Jewish people as: "Lo, it is a people dwelling alone, and not reckoning itself among the nations" (Numbers 23:9). To Jews both then and now, the keynote of their existence is: "I am the Lord thy God, who has separated you from the nations that you should be Mine" (Leviticus 20:26). Throughout their history, Jews have often been nonconformists who refused to acquiesce to the false gods and values of the surrounding communities.

When the Jews were in Persia, Mordechai refused to defer to an evil ruler. As the book of Esther tells us: "And all the king's servants... bowed down and prostrated themselves before Haman... But Mordechai would not bow down nor prostrate himself before him." (Esther 3:2) Mordechai believed that bowing down to a human being was inconsistent with his obligation to worship only God. Later Mordechai condemned inaction by urging Esther to take personal risks to save the Jewish people (Esther 4:13, 14).

The greatest champions of protest against unjust conditions were the Hebrew prophets. Rabbi Abraham Heschel summarizes the attributes of these spokespeople for God: They had the ability to hold God and people in one thought at the same time; they could not be tranquil in an unjust world; they were supremely impatient with evil, due to their intense sensitivity to God's concern for right and wrong; they were advocates for those too weak to plead their own cause (the widow, the orphan, and the oppressed); their major activity was

involvement, remonstrating against wrongs inflicted on other people.<sup>2</sup>

So prophets, in Judaism, are not fortunetellers. They are social activists, protesters, and yes, radicals. They care about the common people in the here and now and call the community to decisive action. They do not claim that human suffering is some sort of *karma* to be accepted with resignation. They challenge us to change ourselves, change the fabric of society, and make the world a better place to live in. The prophets rage against injustices and demand that we fix them in the here and now. In the words of Rabbi Heschel:

What manner of man is the prophet? A student of philosophy who turns from the discourses of the great metaphysicians to the orations of the prophets may feel as if he were going from the realm of the sublime to an area of trivialities. Instead of dealing with the timeless issues of being and becoming, of matter and form, of definitions and demonstrations, he is thrown into orations about widows and orphans, about the corruption of judges and affairs of the marketplace... Prophecy is the voice that God has lent to the silent agony, a voice to the plundered poor, to the profaned riches of the world. It is a form of living, a crossing point of God and man. God is raging in the prophet's words.<sup>3</sup>

In sharp contrast to this prophetic heritage, today's Jewish communities (and most others) often ignore or respond placidly to immoral acts and conditions. We try to maintain a balanced tone while victims of oppression are in extreme agony. But not so the prophets. Isaiah cries out:

Cry aloud, spare not, Lift up your voice like a trumpet, and declare unto My people their transgression... Is this not the fast that I have chosen: To loose the chains of wickedness, to undo the bonds of oppression, to let the crushed go free, and to break every yoke of tyranny. (Isaiah 58:1,6)

The prophet Amos berates those who are content amidst destruction and injustice:

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion,  
And to those who feel secure  
on the mountains of Samaria...  
Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory,  
And stretch themselves upon their couches,  
And eat lambs from the flock,  
And calves from the midst of the stall;  
Who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp...  
Who drink wine in bowls,  
And anoint themselves in the finest oils,  
But are not grieved on the ruin of Joseph!  
(Amos 6:1,4-6)

In order to carry out their mission to be a kingdom of priests and a light unto the nations, Jews throughout history were compelled to live in the world, but apart from it — in effect, living on “the other side,” that is, opposing wickedness. This, the sages comment, is implied in the very name “Hebrew” (*ivri*), from *ever*, “the other side”: “The whole world is on one side [idolaters] and he [Abraham, the Hebrew] is on the other side.” (Midrash *Genesis Rabbah*) Jacques Maritain, a French Catholic philosopher, wrote in 1939 that the Jewish people were

found at the very heart of the world’s structure, stimulating it, exasperating it, moving it... It [the Jewish people] gives the world no peace, it bars slumber, it teaches the world to be discontented and restless as long as the world has not accepted God.<sup>4</sup>

Several distinguished Orthodox rabbis of the past two centuries, including Rabbis Samson Raphael Hirsch, a leading 19<sup>th</sup> century German Orthodox theologian; Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom; Joseph B. Soloveitchik, known as the Rav; and Lord Immanuel Jakobovits, former Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, have stressed that Judaism has a message for their surrounding cultures and that Jews should convey it to their host societies.<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Soloveitchik,

one of the foremost Torah leaders of the twentieth century, believed that Jews have a responsibility to work with others to promote the welfare of civilization. He felt that Jews must aid the needy and protect human rights because such obligations are “implicit in human existence.”<sup>6</sup> He states: “We stand shoulder to shoulder with the rest of civilized society over against an order that defies us all.” Rabbi Sacks believes that working for *tikkun olam* (healing and improving the planet) can be an antidote to religious isolationism:

One of the most powerful [wrong] assumptions of the twentieth century is that faith... belongs [only] to private life. Religion and society, many believe, are two independent entities, so we can edit God out of the language and leave our social world unchanged.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to society’s isolationist attitude, and based on Jewish tradition and values, Jews have been active in many protest movements. Some of these movements have been on behalf of Jewish needs, such as the effort to rescue European Jews from the Holocaust, the battle to support Jewish independence and survival in Israel, and the struggles for Soviet Jewry and later for Syrian and Ethiopian Jewry. But Jews also have been actively involved in struggles for a more peaceful world, human rights, and a cleaner environment. A group of rabbis, acting in accordance with the Jewish ethic of protest, explained why they came to St. Augustine, Florida in 1964 to demonstrate against segregation in that community:

We came because we could not stand silently by our brother’s blood. We had done that too many times before. We have been vocal in our exhortation of others but the idleness of our hands too often revealed an inner silence ... We came as Jews who remember the millions of faceless people who stood quietly, watching the smoke rise from Hitler’s crematoria. We came because we know that second only to silence, the greatest danger to man is loss of faith in man’s capacity to act.<sup>8</sup>

## **Some of Judaism's radical teachings**

**The uniqueness and sanctity of each person.** Judaism teaches that every person is created in God's image (Genesis 1:27), and therefore is of supreme value. This is a truly radical statement, considering that many ancient civilizations (and even some people today) considered their race or nation superior to all others. The English word "barbarian" comes from the ancient Greek *barbaros*, meaning "not a Greek." Judaism expresses the concept that Jews are a chosen people, but this does not imply any special favoritism, but rather a call to greater involvement in working to create a better world.

Imagine if people really took the claim of Genesis 1:27 seriously and viewed each person as created "in the image of God." We would likely not have so much hatred, bigotry, animosity, and violence toward each other. We would not have so much oppression of the poor and underprivileged — "the widow, the orphan, and the stranger" so often invoked in Scripture.

**Do not oppress the stranger.** There is a commandment in Exodus that is repeated in various formulations 36 times in the Hebrew Bible, more often than any other mitzvah: "You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Exodus 23:9.) Having historically been aliens in a foreign land ourselves, we should know what it is like to be oppressed and looked down upon simply for being foreigners.

Based on this frequent scriptural repetition, Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, former Chancellor of Bar Ilan University in Israel, points out that Judaism teaches a special kind of justice, an "empathic justice," that seeks to make people identify themselves with each other's needs, each other's hopes and aspirations, each other's defeats and frustrations. Because Jews have known the distress of being slaves and the loneliness of having been strangers, we are to project ourselves into the souls of others and make their plight our own. We are to empathize —literally "to feel with" — the lonely stranger among us.

Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Horowitz, the Bostoner Rebbe, reinforces this concept:

The fact that the Jewish people had to experience 400 years of Egyptian exile, including 210 years of actual slavery, was critical in molding our national personality into one of compassion and concern for our fellow man, informed by the realization that we have a vital role to play in the world... For this reason, God begins the Ten Commandments with a reminder that “I am the Lord, your God, who took you out of Egypt” (Exodus 20:2). We must constantly remember that we were slaves in order to always appreciate the ideal of freedom, not only for ourselves but also for others. We must do what we can to help others to live free of the bondage of the evil spirit, free of the bondage of cruelty, of abuse and lack of caring.<sup>9</sup>

**Helping the poor and hungry.** To help the poor and hungry and to support communal purposes and institutions, Judaism places great stress on the giving of charity as an act of righteousness. The Hebrew word for charity, *tzedakah*, literally means “righteousness” and is derived from the same root as *tzedek* — justice. In the Jewish tradition, giving *tzedakah* is not an act of condescension by one person to another who is in need. It is the fulfillment of a *mitzvah*, a holy commandment, to a fellow human being, who has equal status before God. The beggar has the *right* to ask for help, and the person asked is often *obligated* to give it. All wealth ultimately belongs to God, so, if you prosper, that good fortune is meant to enable you to be a steward of God’s wealth and to take care of the less fortunate. In so doing, you yourself are also blessed. And everyone, even a beggar, is obligated in turn to give to others, because there is always someone worse off than he is.

For this reason, many Torah laws are designed to aid the poor: the produce of corners of the fields are to be left uncut for the poor to take (Leviticus 19:9); the gleanings of the wheat harvest and fallen fruit are to be left for the needy (Leviticus 19:10); and during the sabbatical year, the land is to be left fallow so the poor (as well as animals) may eat of whatever grows freely (Leviticus 25:2-7). In the same chapter of Leviticus in the Torah portion “kedoshim” (“You shall be

holy”), in which “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18) appears, the Torah outlines some specific ways that this mandate can be put into practice:

You shall not steal; nor shall you deal falsely nor lie to one another... You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him... You shall not curse the deaf, and you shall not put a stumbling block before the blind... You shall do no injustice in judgment; be not partial to the poor, and favor not the mighty; in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. You shall not go up and down as a talebearer among your people; neither shall you stand idly by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 19: 11, 14-16)

**The proper treatment of non-Jews.** Judaism is concerned with the proper treatment of non-Jews as well as Jews. The Talmud contains many statutes that require Jews to assist and provide for non-Jews as well as Jews:

We support the poor of the non-Jew along with the poor of Israel and visit the sick of the non-Jew along with the sick of Israel and bury the dead of the non-Jew along with the dead of Israel, for the sake of peace (*mipnei darchei shalom*). (Gittin 61a)

In a city where there are both Jews and Gentiles, the collectors of alms collect from both; they feed the poor of both, visit the sick of both, bury both, comfort the mourners whether they be Jews or Gentiles, and restore the lost goods of both, *mipnei darchei shalom*: to promote peace and cooperation. (*Yerushalmi Dmai* 4:6 (24a))

**Jewish teachings on social involvement and protest.** Judaism teaches that people must struggle to create a better society. The Torah frequently admonishes: “And you shall eradicate the evil from your midst” (Deuteronomy 13:6, 17:7, 21:21, 24:7.) Injustice cannot be passively accepted; it must be actively resisted and, ultimately, eliminated. The Talmudic sages teach

that one reason Jerusalem was destroyed was that its citizens failed in their responsibility to constructively criticize each other's improper behavior (Shabbat 99b). They indicate that "love which does not contain the element of [constructive] criticism is not really love" (*Genesis Rabbah* 54:3).

Among the many rabbinical teachings about the importance of proper criticism are the following:

Whoever is able to protest against the transgressions of his own family and does not do so is punished [held liable, held responsible] for the transgressions of his family. Whoever is able to protest against the transgressions of the people of his community and does not do so is punished for the transgressions of his community. Whoever is able to protest against the transgressions of the entire world and does not do so is punished for the transgressions of the entire world. (Shabbat 54b)

If a person of learning participates in public affairs and serves as judge or arbiter, he gives stability to the land. But if he sits in his home and says to himself, "What have the affairs of society to do with me?... Why should I trouble myself with the people's voices of protest? Let my soul dwell in peace!"— if he does this, he overthrows the world. (*Tanchuma on Mishpatim* 2)

While the essential elements of individual Jewish practice include devotion to Torah, study, prayer, performing good deeds and other *mitzvot* (commandments), and cultivating a life of piety, Judaism teaches that to be considered truly pious, a person must also protest against injustice in society (Shabbat 55a.) Moses did not simply sit and study after encountering the burning bush. He returned to Egypt to confront Pharaoh and free the Hebrew slaves.

Judaism teaches that it is not sufficient merely to perform *mitzvot* while passively acquiescing to unjust conditions. The Maharal of Prague, a sixteenth-century sage, said that individual piety pales in the face of the sin of not protesting against an emerging communal evil, and a person will be held accountable



for not preventing wickedness when capable of doing so.<sup>10</sup> Holocaust survivor and author Elie Wiesel said: “Take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

One of the most important dangers of silence in the face of evil is that it implies acceptance or possibly even support. According to Rabbenu Yonah, a medieval sage, sinners may think to themselves, “Since others are neither reproving nor contending against us, our deeds are permissible.” (*Orchot Tzaddikim* 24)

**Justice, justice shall you pursue. (Deuteronomy 16: 20)** The pursuit of a just society is one of the most fundamental concepts of Judaism. The prevalence of injustice in today’s world makes all the more urgent Judaism’s emphasis on the importance of actively seeking justice. To practice justice is considered among the highest demands of prophetic religion:

It has been told you, O human being, what is good  
And what the Lord requires of you:  
Only to do justly, love *chesed* (mercy, kindness),  
And walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

The prophets constantly stress the importance of applying justice:

Learn to do well — seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow... Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and they who return to her with righteousness. (Isaiah 1:17, 27, in the *haftorah* [prophetic reading] that is read on the Sabbath before Tisha B’Av)

The Lord of Hosts shall be exalted in justice, the Holy God is shown holy in righteousness. (Isaiah 5:16)

The prophet Amos warned the people that without the practice of justice, God is repelled by their worship:

Take away from Me the noise of your songs  
and let Me not hear the melody

of your stringed instruments,  
but let justice well up as waters,  
and righteousness as a mighty stream. (Amos 5:23, 24)

The practice of justice is even part of the symbolic betrothal between the Jewish people and God:

And I will betroth you unto Me forever; And, I will betroth you unto Me in righteousness, justice, loving kindness, and compassion. And I will betroth you unto Me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord. (Hosea 2:21-22)

Many other statements in the Jewish tradition emphasize the great importance placed on working for justice. For example, the book of Proverbs asserts: "To do righteousness and justice is preferred by God above sacrifice" (Proverbs 21:3). The Psalmist exhorts: "Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute" (Psalms 82:3).

The prophets of Israel were the greatest champions of social justice in world history. Jeremiah (5:28) rebukes the Jewish people when they fail to plead the cause of the orphan or help the needy. He castigates an entire generation, for "in your skirts is found the blood of the souls of the innocent poor" (2:34). Ezekiel rebukes the whole nation for "using oppression, robbing, defrauding the poor and the needy, and extorting from the stranger" (22:29). Isaiah (5:8) and Micah (2:2) criticize wealthy Jews who built up large holdings of property at the expense of their neighbors. The prophetic books are filled with such moral admonitions.

Based on these teachings, Jews have regarded the practice of justice and the seeking of a just society as Divine imperatives. This has inspired many Jews throughout history to be leaders in struggles for better social conditions. The teachings of the Torah, prophets, and sages have been the most powerful inspiration for justice in the history of the world.

**Seek peace and pursue it. (Psalms 34:15)** Judaism describes a special obligation to strive for peace. Our tradition commands

that Jews actively pursue peace. The Midrash states that there are many commandments that require a certain time and place for their performance, but with regard to the mandate to “seek peace and pursue it” (Psalms. 34:15) we are to seek it in our own place and pursue it everywhere else (Midrash *Leviticus Rabbah* 9:9). The famous Talmudic sage Hillel states that we should “be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace” (*Pirkei Avot* 1:12). There is a rabbinic story of how Aaron the Priest would go back and forth between adversaries, gradually bringing them together in peace. He was the model peacemaker. The only other value that Judaism teaches us to *pursue* is justice.

The Jewish sages stressed the importance of peace:

Great is peace, for God’s name is peace... Great is peace, for it encompasses all blessings...Great is peace, for even in times of war, peace must be sought... Great is peace for when the Messiah comes, he will commence with peace, as it is said (in Isaiah. 52:7): “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet (footsteps) of the messenger of good tidings, who announces peace.” (*Leviticus Rabbah* 9:9)

Great is peace, for with peace the Holy One, Who is to be blessed, will announce the Redemption of Israel, and with peace He will console Jerusalem... See how beloved is peace! When the Holy One, Blessed be He, wished to bless Israel, He could not find a vessel great enough to contain their blessings, except for peace. (*Deuteronomy Rabbah* 5:15)

It is significant that many of the most important Jewish prayers conclude with a supplication for peace. These include the *Amidah* (silent prayer — also known as the *Shmoneh Esrei* — which is recited three times daily), the *Kaddish*, the Grace After Meals, and the Priestly Blessing.

The Jewish tradition does not mandate pacifism or peace at any price, although some Jews do become pacifists based on Jewish values.<sup>11</sup> The Israelites frequently went forth to battle and not always in defensive wars. But they always held to the

ideal of universal peace and yearned for the day when there would be no more bloodshed or violence and when the instruments of war would be converted into tools of production:

And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,  
And their spears into pruning hooks;  
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,  
Neither shall they learn war any more.  
But they shall sit every man under his vine and  
under his fig tree;  
And none shall make them afraid;  
For the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.  
(Isaiah 2:4; Micah 4:3-4)

Rabbi Albert Axelrad, former Hillel director at Brandeis University, argued that Jews should be “pacifoids.” This means doing *everything* possible to avoid war, but also recognizing that in extreme cases war may be tragically necessary. Such an approach would likely have avoided recent United States wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and recent Israeli wars in Gaza and Lebanon, with all the resulting damage and tragedy from which we are still suffering.

\* \* \*

## **In summary**

Judaism stresses that we are to love other people as ourselves, to be kind to strangers “for you were strangers in the land of Egypt,” and to act with compassion toward the homeless, the poor, the orphan, the widow, even to towards enemies, and to all of God’s creatures. The Torah also teaches us how to be activists and not “stand by our neighbor’s blood,” which means not allowing evil to happen to others while doing nothing to stop it. We are, as the account of Cain’s question in Genesis implies, “our brother’s (and sister’s) keepers.” The Prophets understood this, and so did our Sages throughout the centuries.

These are only a few of the many authentic concepts and references in the Jewish tradition that can be cited to prove the radical nature of Judaism as an activist religion. More

information about these and other radical Jewish teachings can be found in my book, *Judaism and Global Survival*.

In later chapters these concepts, as well as additional radical teachings from the Torah, the prophets, the Talmudic sages and some recent rabbis, will be discussed in more depth. For now, it is enough to say that these ethical principles helped to shape my own activism. Now it is for us — all of us, Jews and Gentiles alike — to pick up this thread of “justice, justice shall you pursue” and carry it into the future.

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## Notes for Chapter 2

- <sup>1</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *God in Search of Man*, Harper and Row, New York, 1955
- <sup>2</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1962, and *The Insecurity of Freedom*, Noonday Press, New York, 1959, pp. 9-13 and 92-93.
- <sup>3</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, pp. 3,5.
- <sup>4</sup> Quoted in Norman Lamm, *The Royal Reach*, Feldheim, Inc., New York, 1970, p.131.
- <sup>5</sup> David Shatz, Chaim I. Waxman, and Nathan J. Diament (eds.), *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*, Jason Aronson, Northvale, NJ, 1997, p.3
- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, 4; also see Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Confrontation,” *Tradition* 6:2 (1964), pp.5-29.
- <sup>7</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *The Persistence of Faith*, Jews College, London, 1990, p.27.
- <sup>8</sup> “Why We Went,” (paper of the Social Action Commission, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New York); quoted in Rabbi Henry Cohen, *Justice, Justice: A Jewish View of the Black Revolution*, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New York, 1969, p.18.
- <sup>9</sup> Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Horowitz, the Bostoner Rebbe, “And You Shall tell Your Son,” *Young Israel Viewpoint*, Spring, 1997. Quoted in David Sears, *Compassion for Humanity in the Jewish Tradition*, Jason Aronson, Northvale, New Jersey/ Jerusalem, 1998, p.22.
- <sup>10</sup> R. Judah Loew, *Netivot Olam, Shaar Hatochahah*, end of chapter 2.
- <sup>11</sup> Rabbi Yonassan Gershom is a pacifist. He considers pacifism to be his

personal *chumra* — an extra strictness — voluntarily taken on in the service of God. In the course of helping me write this chapter, he explained: “Some people are extra strict with such *mitzvot* as observing the Sabbath, keeping glatt kosher, dressing very modestly, etc. In the same spirit, I choose to be extra strict in pursuing peace. The role of a pacifist is to remind people that war is not a normal condition of human existence, and that we should all be striving for peace.”



Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (second from the right) marching with Dr. Martin Luther King (center) in Selma, Alabama, 1965. Heschel said of this march, “I felt like my feet were praying.”

## Chapter 3

### Should the Holocaust be a spur to action?

*For me the Holocaust was not only a Jewish tragedy, but also a human tragedy. After the war, when I saw that the Jews were talking only about the tragedy of six million Jews, I sent letters to Jewish organizations asking them to also talk about the millions of others who were persecuted together with us — many of them only because they helped Jews. — Simon Wiesenthal<sup>1</sup>*

Every year around Holocaust Remembrance Day in the spring, my Orthodox synagogue has a memorial commemoration. It is a well-planned event, featuring a talk by a Holocaust scholar or survivor, appropriate songs by local yeshiva choirs, and the lighting of candles by descendants of Holocaust victims or survivors. Similar events are held at many other synagogues, Jewish community centers, and other communal venues on or around that day. This is very appropriate, since it is essential that the horrors of the Holocaust never be forgotten and that young people be educated about why and how the cataclysm happened.

But there is seldom an attempt to use the Holocaust as a spur to action against other injustices. Of course, there cannot and should not be any attempt to equate events, but there should

be a recognition that some of the mindsets behind the Holocaust are still causing much harm to people and it is important not to repeat the apathy that was so prevalent during the Holocaust.

In his book, *The Dignity of Difference*, Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, argues that there can only be reconciliation and an end of war and violence through forgiveness. But his awareness of Jewish history involving centuries of exiles and expulsions, pogroms and persecutions, starting with the first crusade and culminating with the murder of two-thirds of European Jews during the Holocaust, makes him wonder how he can let go of the pain that is written into his very soul.

And yet I must. For the sake of my children and theirs, not yet born. I cannot build the future on the hatreds of the past, nor can I teach them to love God more by loving people less... The duty I owe my ancestors who died because of their faith is to build a world in which people no longer die because of their faith. I honour the past not by repeating it but by learning from it—by refusing to add pain to pain, grief to grief. That is why we must answer hatred with love, violence with peace, resentment with generosity of spirit and conflict with reconciliation.<sup>2</sup>

What a sharp contrast with the attitude of the vast majority of people, who generally think in terms of revenge and often revert to hateful attitudes and violent reactions to actual or perceived harms.

Instead of learning universal lessons from the Holocaust and making sure that *all* injustices are actively responded to, many Jews have adopted the view that the whole world is against us, or at ‘best’ does not care about us. Therefore, they believe, they need only be concerned about their own welfare and that of other Jews, while ignoring problems that do not specifically affect Jews.

The Holocaust was an unprecedented catastrophe in which six million Jews were slaughtered simply because of their people and religion, and at least five million others were also killed because of who they were. It is important that there be



annual commemorations of the Holocaust and that people continue visiting Holocaust museums, so that the unspeakable horrors are not forgotten. And it is also important to avoid simplistic comparisons with the Holocaust, lest its meaning be diluted and the suffering of those who perished or were tortured in the Holocaust be minimized.

However, we should not try to build a wall around the Holocaust and turn it into a sacred shrine that is isolated from the rest of history and the rest of the world. We should not use the Holocaust to silence thought about how the mentalities and methods analogous to those that produced the Holocaust continue to promote other injustices and atrocities. We should not let the Holocaust and our respect for the memory of its victims and survivors inhibit us from confronting the issue of how the Holocaust came about, especially since the attitudes that led to it are still prevalent in the world today. We should not keep the lessons of the Holocaust in a narrow straitjacket in the name of remembering the victims.

I believe that the best way to honor the memories of Holocaust victims is to work against the ideologies and techniques that helped produce it and still continue, although to a lesser degree, to inflict tremendous damage on people, animals, and the entire planet. We honor the lives and deaths of Holocaust victims by working to combat all injustice and oppression. We owe it to them to make the world a better place.

The greatest tribute we can give to the victims and survivors of the Holocaust is to confront the fascist, might-makes-right mentality that produced the Holocaust wherever such attitudes and behavior appear, so that nothing remotely like the Holocaust ever happens again to Jews or to anybody else. Doing this will be a *kiddush HaShem* (a sanctification of God's name) that will greatly benefit the world. We should learn from the Holocaust and be impelled by it to work for a more just, non-violent world. Apathy to current oppressions of people and animals does not honor the memory of Holocaust victims. Letting the Holocaust be a spur to action to try to make positive changes is a much better way to honor the martyrs of the Holocaust.

And it goes without saying that the Holocaust should not be used to justify acts of oppression against others, or to keep

Jews from responding swiftly and effectively to the oppression of others. If we look at modern studies about the cycles of bullying and abuse, the sad fact is that the abused often grow up to become abusers unless there is conscious intervention to break the cycle.<sup>3</sup>

While it is true that the Holocaust was an unprecedented catastrophe, it is also true that there have been other genocides in recent years, such as the calculated mass murder of two million Cambodians in the 1970's, the "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia and the Balkans in the 1990s, the murder of over 800,000 Tutsi tribespeople by the Hutus in Rwanda in 1994, and the killings currently taking place in Darfur. The world sees these events as reminiscent to the Holocaust because they are genocides, even though the numbers of dead are not as great and the victims are not Jews. As Jews, we are obligated not to stand idly by and let these murders unfold. We should be among the first to protest and get involved in stopping them.

We should not feel that the suffering during the Holocaust was so great that any current suffering is minor by comparison, and therefore we do not need to be concerned about it. We should not feel that because the world was silent when Jews were being massacred, we have a legitimate excuse for inaction today. We should instead make sure that the stirring motto "Never again!" is applied not only to Jews, but to all people everywhere.

Looking at the Holocaust as an impetus to activism can help revitalize Judaism by showing how our values can be addressed to current threats to humanity, such as hunger, environmental degradation, racial profiling and other prejudices, terrorism, war, and genocide.

Elie Wiesel has pointed out that there can be no analogies to the Holocaust, but that it can be used as a reference point. In that context, we can consider the estimated 20 million people worldwide, including almost 7 million infants, who die each year due to malnutrition. Of course, victims of hunger are not being singled out because of their religion, race, or nationality, but, like Holocaust victims, they die while the world goes about its business, grumbling about personal inconveniences, indifferent to the plight of the starving people.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, himself a refugee from Europe just before the Holocaust, applied this reasoning to the Civil Rights Movement. He marched with Dr. Martin Luther King to help end segregation in the United States. He saw the parallels between making Jews wear a “badge of shame” (Star of David identifying them as Jews) and singling out African Americans because of their skin color.

The *Mishna* teaches that if one saves a single human life, it is as if one has saved the entire world (Sanhedrin 4:5).<sup>4</sup> What then if one *fails* to save a single life? Or 20 million lives? Although Elie Wiesel argues that the Holocaust can’t be compared to any other event, he does believe in caring about and being involved in working to end other genocides, oppressions, and tragedies.

In deciding if we should help others who are being oppressed or slaughtered, we should consider the famous statement by Pastor Martin Niemöller (1892–1984) about the inactivity of Germans after the Nazis rose to power and purged one group after another;

They came first for the Communists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Communist. Then they came for the Social Democrats, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Social Democrat. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn’t speak up because I wasn’t a Jew. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up.<sup>5</sup>

The following statement by Rabbi Philip Bentley, former Chair and now Honorary President of the Jewish Peace Fellowship, in his essay “Fixing the World” in the book *Roots of Jewish Nonviolence*, is a good summary of the arguments in this chapter:

There are two ways to respond to the lessons taught us by the Holocaust. We can say, “No one is our true ally, therefore we must concern ourselves only with ourselves” Or we can say, “The Nazis were able to

demonize the Jews and then murder millions of us because we were unable to bring others to our cause. We must therefore fight every kind of bigotry and tyranny from the outset. lest we also become victims.” A national trauma like the Holocaust brings out the best and the worst in people. The hard lesson of the Holocaust is that we must be quick to respond to every threat to ourselves, but also to every kind of racism and bigotry, no matter who its victims are.

The world is threatened today as perhaps never before. The potential catastrophes threaten not only Jews, but all of humanity as well. Therefore, it is essential that the Holocaust not be used as a reason to avoid involvement, but just the opposite: as a spur to consistent activism, to create a more just, humane, peaceful, and environmentally sustainable world.

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### Notes for Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup> ThinkExist.com quotation, <http://thinkexist.com/quotation/for-me-was-the-holocaust-not-only-a-jewish/348597.html>

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, Continuum, London/New York, revised edition 2003, p. 190.

<sup>3</sup>For an examination of how the abuse cycle may be affecting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, See Yonassan Gershom’s article, "Breaking the Cycle of Abuse," included in his book, *Eight Candles of Consciousness: Essays on Jewish Nonviolence*, pp. 31-24. Also online at: <http://www.wrmea.com/component/content/article/137/6258-seeing-the-light-breaking-the-cycle-of-abuse.html>

<sup>4</sup> This quote appears and/or is cited in multiple places in Jewish texts with variant versions. Some versions read “whoever saves a single *Jewish* soul,” leading anti-Jewish critics to claim that Jews do not value the lives of Gentiles. However, when Jews quote this sentence as a maxim, it is always in the universalist version. The Qu’ran also cites the universalist version of this Mishnah (Sura 5:32)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/niem.htm>

## Chapter 4

### Are there ways to reduce antisemitism?

*Anti-Semitism is not to be overcome by getting people to forget us, but to know us. (Meyer Levin)*

*The worst mistake I ever made was that stupid, suburban prejudice of Anti-Semitism. (Ezra Pound)*

*Thou shalt not be a victim, thou shalt not be a perpetrator, but above all, thou shalt not be a bystander. (Yehuda Bauer)*

Antisemitism,<sup>1</sup> a euphemism for Jew hatred that was coined in the nineteenth century, has existed in nearly every age and nearly every country, generally irrespective of circumstances, even where there have been few or no Jews. Antisemitism, like racism, is not based on reason. It sets up Jews as scapegoats for current problems, and lets those who are really responsible for society's ills off the hook. Whatever the current social order does not like (or feels threatened by) is projected onto the Jews.

In the nineteenth century, with the rise of nationalism, Jews were portrayed as “universalists” with no loyalty to any country. In the mid-twentieth century when global consciousness increased, Jews began to be negatively portrayed

as “separatists” who only care about themselves and not the rest of the world. Neither of these stereotypes about Jews is true — in fact, they are incompatible opposites — but they serve to give simplistic explanations for complex problems to the more gullible sectors of society. Similarly, Jews have been portrayed simultaneously as greedy, wealthy bankers and capitalists and as revolutionary, subversive Marxists. This scapegoating has often caused great pain, oppression, and hardships for the Jewish people.

Jews have probably suffered more from prejudice throughout Western history than has any other group. The Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Holocaust are just three of the most horrible examples. Many times Jews have been killed, expelled from countries where they had lived and contributed to society for many generations, subjected to pogroms, or converted at sword point (or died resisting), solely because they were Jewish. Whenever conditions were bad, the economy suffered, or there was a plague, blaming “the Jews” provided a convenient scapegoat. In parts of medieval Europe, long before the discovery of bacteria, it was commonly believed that the very presence of a Jew would sour the milk and spoil the crops. Jews often paid with their lives for these superstitions.

Unfortunately, in the twenty-first century antisemitism has gone global and is increasing in many areas of the world. Neo-Nazis, Skinheads, Muslim extremists and other hate groups use the Internet and other modern means to spread their hateful messages. Old lies and forgeries, such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, have been “rediscovered” and posted on the web, complete with pseudo-intellectual analyses. People don’t always use critical thinking about what they read, and some take these canards at face value. There are also many groups and even some government leaders, like Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran, who claim that the Holocaust never occurred or has been wildly exaggerated.

This prejudice is not limited to right-wing fanatics. Some segments of the anti-war movement have conspiracy theories that blame the Jews for pushing the United States into invading Iraq and controlling other aspects of U.S. foreign policy. Other examples of antisemitism are protest signs and speeches that equate Zionism with Nazism, Jewish leaders with Hitler, and

the Star of David with a swastika. There have been many examples of increased anti-Israel statements and actions that are rooted in antisemitism in the Arab world and among some Muslim communities in many countries.

## **Misuse of claims of antisemitism**

It is very important to distinguish between genuine antisemitism — which is discussed above — and *perceived* antisemitism, which may or may not be the same thing.

Of course, we must do everything possible to reduce genuine antisemitism and respond to it whenever it occurs. However, there are some segments of the Jewish community that regard any criticism of Israel or Judaism as “antisemitism.” This approach is actually counterproductive, because if you define any criticism of anything that Jews do as antisemitism, you close off the possibility of dialogue. Some non-Jews then write off real antisemitism as “there go those Jews again, always playing the antisemitism card,” and the term loses meaning.

Unfortunately, people challenging policies of the Israeli government, no matter how justified or reasonable these challenges may be, are often labeled as antisemitic, or, if they are Jewish, as self-hating Jews. Certainly some criticism of Israel is based on antisemitism, and some antisemites have used the Palestinian cause to mask their hatred of Jews, but this is not always the case. To be critical of Israel continuing to build settlements, or of some Israelis destroying Palestinian olive groves, an act arguably forbidden by the Torah (Deuteronomy 20:19-20), or of the behavior of some Israeli soldiers at checkpoints, is not necessarily antisemitic. As long as these criticisms are not generalized to demonize Israel or “the Jews,” they should be seen as a legitimate exercise of the democratic right to criticize one’s society or government.

Being critical of one’s government does not mean that one is unpatriotic or hateful. I believe that the highest form of patriotism is to challenge one’s country to live up to its highest ideals. Criticism of Israel is not necessarily antisemitic, just as criticism of the United States is not necessarily anti-American. Painting every criticism of Israel as antisemitic can have the

same effect as crying “wolf” when there is no wolf around. It may turn off people to real cases of antisemitism. I believe that one’s country or group should be applauded when right and constructively criticized when wrong.

When people see a spectrum of respectful dissent, when they see a variety of opinions being expressed by different groups of Jews, then it’s much harder for antisemites to paint “the Jews” with a broad brush. But when dissent is stifled, and the public hears only the most extreme opinions, people may assume that all Jews think alike.

For many years, as discussed in Chapter 5, certain strong supporters of Israel have used aggressive tactics to try and shut out contrary opinions about Israel. However, there are also Jews, both in America and in Israel, who love Israel *but* want Israel to end the occupation and take greater steps toward peace. The two are not mutually exclusive, and it is not proper to label such Jews as “self-hating.”

## **Reducing antisemitism**

While there will always be some antisemitism (and other prejudices) in the world, there are things that can and should be done to reduce it. While some people will hate Jews regardless of the actions of Jews, this should not deter us from taking actions that can help reduce antisemitism. This requires both vigilance against bigots and the willingness to work cooperatively with people of good will to create a world where all forms of discrimination are reduced or eliminated.

Below are some suggestions of ways to reduce antisemitism. I hope others will build on these suggestions and suggest additional approaches. All of the suggestions below have additional benefits, so it would be important to act on them even if there were no antisemitism.

### **1. Apply Jewish values to help reduce poverty, hunger, illiteracy and other social ills.**

One prime example of a group that is doing this is the American Jewish World Service (AJWS), which, as described on their website, “funds hundreds of grassroots organizations working to promote health, education, economic development,



disaster relief, and social and political change in the developing world.” Besides fighting to reduce hunger, poverty, and disease in poorer countries, AJWS advocates for global change and educates the American Jewish community on global issues.

A group that does similar work is *Ve’ahavta* (the first Hebrew word in the verse “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*”), a Canadian Jewish Humanitarian and Relief Committee. As they state on their website, they are “motivated by the Jewish value of *tzedakah* — the obligation to do justice — by assisting the needy in Canada and other countries, through volunteerism, education, and acts of kindness, while building bridges between Jews and other peoples, worldwide.” Their motto is: “Repairing the world (*tikkun olam*) through volunteerism, kindness, and building global bridges.”

Another group that helps needy people worldwide is *Mazon*. Founded in 1985 as “A Jewish Response to Hunger,” *Mazon* “is a national nonprofit organization that allocates donations from the Jewish community to prevent and alleviate hunger among people of all faiths and backgrounds.”

Information about these and other Jewish activist groups is in Appendices D and E.

While it is essential to educate all people — Jews and non-Jews alike — about antisemitism and how to combat it, and to openly confront and oppose antisemitism, racism, and other forms of discrimination, it is also necessary to work to reduce and eliminate poverty, unlivable housing, hunger, illiteracy, unemployment, homelessness, and other social ills and injustices that lead to discontent and scapegoating. Since half the world’s population does not even have the basic human needs of food, clothing and shelter, it’s all too easy for demagogues to deflect the blame onto Jews and other minorities.

Just, democratic societies will be far safer for everyone, including Jews. Jewish organizations, such as the Anti-Defamation League, are working to reduce antisemitism, but much more needs to be done to eliminate this ancient, persistent bigotry.

Imagine if thousands of synagogues, Jewish schools, and other Jewish institutions, while continuing the many positive things they are already doing, made *tikkun olam* — the healing,

repair, and proper transformation of the world — into their central focus. Not only would this have very positive benefits for the world, but it might also help greatly reduce antisemitism, because people could see Jews in a positive light, working constructively to help others.

## **2. Spotlight the many positive things that Israel does.**

Israel is always among the first countries to respond when there are natural disasters, such as the earthquake in Haiti, the Asian tsunami, and Hurricane Katrina that devastated New Orleans and the Gulf Coast. Israeli hospitals provide Israeli and Palestinian Arabs as well as Jews with the best medical care possible.

In addition to improving Israel's image, such efforts can also benefit Israel in times of crisis. When Israel had the worst forest fire in her history near Haifa in December 2010, she received much help from many countries, including the Muslim countries of Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan, as well as the Palestinian Authority.

## **3. Increase efforts to resolve conflicts between Israel and the Palestinians and other Arab nations.**

(This is discussed more in Chapter 6.) In addition to spotlighting the many positive things that Israel does, we should honestly examine certain aspects of Israel that might be painful to face. If we do not deal with the problems between Israel and the Palestinians, this conflict will continue to overshadow much of the good that Israel does.

There is evidence that some of Israel's actions fuel antisemitism, especially when Arabs and other third world populations, as well as western social activists see TV footage of the worst of Israel's behavior in the occupied territories. While it is true that certain networks play the same unrepresentative, violent footage over and over to inflame their viewers, it's also true that if this conflict were to be resolved, such footage could not exist. In this day of satellite communications, it's often impossible for events to be hidden from the public. In the electronic age, secrecy seldom works, and the negative things emphasized in the Palestinian media overshadow many of the positive things that Israel does.

So we must ask ourselves with regard to the recent increase in antisemitism, how much do Israeli policies with regard to the Palestinians and Israeli Arabs contribute to it? This is a very difficult question, one that the Jewish community has insufficiently considered.

Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert stated in 2009 that occupation was a factor behind worldwide antisemitism. He said, "As long as this reality [occupation] continues, it makes it possible to attack Israel and gives anti-Jewish sources the opportunity to be heard. The complicated situation we're in encourages antisemitism." He was reacting to reports of an increase in antisemitism worldwide after Israel's Operation Cast Lead in Gaza. He also asserted, "As long as we continue to be presented as occupiers, we'll continue to suffer from antisemitism."

Because of modern communications, people are much more aware of injustices in other parts of the world than they were in the past. Anybody can now post raw footage on YouTube for all to see. So when people hear that there are separate villages for Arabs and Jews, even separate roads in the occupied territories, they interpret this as segregation and develop a less favorable attitude toward Israel and Jews.

Israel should not use the fact that Palestinians are teaching hatred and carrying out terrorist acts, or that some other nations are oppressing their people, as an excuse to justify unnecessarily harsh measures against Palestinians. As the old saying goes, two wrongs don't make a right. Of course, Israel must always continue to guard against possible terrorist acts, but in ways that minimize the negative images and avoidable harms.

**4. Israel should announce that once the Middle East conflict is settled, she will, hopefully along with the United States and other nations, devote a percentage of the money now being used for its military to the improvement of the lives of all of the people in the region by working to reduce poverty, hunger, pollution, illiteracy, and other problems.**

A model for this idea is the proposal by the Network of Spiritual Progressives and *Tikkun* magazine, led by Rabbi Michael Lerner, for a "Global Marshall Plan," in which the U.S.

(and possibly other nations) would “use 1-2% of [their] GDP each year to reduce global poverty, disease, illiteracy, and environmental destruction.”<sup>2</sup> This idea will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 9, where I will explore ideas about a foreign policy consistent with Jewish values.

**5. Israel and Jews worldwide should work actively with others to reduce climate change and other environmental threats.**

An excellent start at this was discussed in an October 27, 2010 Environmental News Network report, “Israel and Palestine Declare War... Against Climate Change,” which discussed an agreement between Israel, 13 other Mediterranean-bordering nations, and the Palestinian Authority to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Many people were encouraged by this example of Israel and the Palestinians working together to try to avert a common threat. There have also been other examples of recent cooperation between Israel, Jordan and Palestinians on other environmental issues of joint concern, such as ways to conserve water and energy resources.

In November 2010, in the midst of Israel’s worst drought ever, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian religious leaders in Israel put aside their differences and united for a first-time-ever joint prayer service for much-needed rain.

Working together on common problems provides an ideal way to build bridges of understanding among different cultures. People fear what they do not know, so getting to know each other on a personal level is a positive step toward understanding each other on a cultural level and ultimately living together cooperatively and harmoniously.

**6. There should be increased efforts to support groups working for Israeli/Palestinian and Jewish/Muslim unity and peaceful cooperation.**

In his book, *Eight Candles of Consciousness: Essays on Jewish Nonviolence*, Rabbi Yonassan Gershom tells the following true story, which helps show the value of constructive dialogues:

In Israel, there are a number of peace programs trying to bring Arab and Jewish youth together in cooperative projects. This is important work, because these two groups rarely mingle socially otherwise.

On the first day of such programs, leaders can barely get the teens to call each other by their names instead of racial slurs. But by the end of the week, most of the hostility is gone, and some real sharing has taken place. At the last session, each side is allowed to ask the other any question — no holds barred — about being an Arab or Jew.

There are, of course, the usual teenage questions about dating habits, favorite music, etc. But on one occasion someone said, “Now that we have become friends, what will we do if we meet on the battlefield?”

Another teenager answered, “Then I would have to kill you.”

There was a long silence. Then softly, almost in a whisper, another voice said, “I would lay down my gun and cry.”

The enemy, once humanized, could no longer be the enemy.<sup>3</sup>

## **7. Jewish schools, synagogues, community centers and other groups should increase efforts to visibly perform services for people of other religions and for the general community.**

Of course, we should not do these things “visibly” just for the publicity — that would be crass and self-serving. We should do them *lishmah*, for their own sake, as a mitzvah. But it doesn’t hurt to let people know that Judaism is where we get these positive values, especially in these times when people are focused on inclusiveness and expect to see identifying logos for various helping organizations. Rabbi Gershom, cited above, shared the following story with me:

A few years ago, a big tornado touched down and devastated a whole town not far from where I live. All kinds of groups showed up in their official T-shirts, hard hats and such, ready to help with cleanup, manage

the soup lines, and comfort those who had lost their homes. Well, a group of Jews from Minneapolis got the idea that they should go, too — *and that they should be visible as Jews*. So they made signs for their van, wore their yarmulkes, and pitched in.

For most of the people in that small Midwestern town, it was the first time they had ever met a Jew. And it was probably the first time that members of those other humanitarian organizations realized that Jews are willing to dig in and get their hands dirty, just like everybody else. Today, there is a permanent response team called Nechama (Comfort), officially sponsored by the Minneapolis Jewish community, which goes to help after such disasters.

Here is another example of a positive Jewish local effort that is making a difference. In Atlanta, there is a group organized by the local B'nai B'rith and known as “Pinch Hitters,” composed mainly of Jews, who volunteer to work in hospitals on Christmas day (unless it occurs on Shabbat, in which case they volunteer on December 24 before sundown), so that Christians can take the day off and enjoy their holiday with their families. This engenders much good will with universal praise by the hospital staff for the volunteers’ presence, attitude, and work ethic. Many recipients of the kindness of the Pinch Hitters consider them to be more like “Hall-of-Fame Sluggers.” It would be wonderful if such things happened even more often all over the United States and in other countries.

Rabbi Gershom also related to me that in Minneapolis one of the local synagogues hosts a dinner for the homeless on Thanksgiving. Only it’s more than just a soup line. It’s a very nice dinner with white tablecloths, flower centerpieces, and a live band. It’s all done voluntarily, including rides to and from the homeless shelters. For families in crisis, such an event can be a big ray of hope that is not soon forgotten.

Yet another illustration of how such actions can convey a favorable image of Jews and Judaism and produce positive results was described in a front page article in the July 23, 2010 issue of the *Forward*. The article pointed out that some delegates to a Presbyterian conference changed their position on

a proposed boycott of Israel partly because of the help that Jews provided after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans. One person recalled the Jews who worked with his church after the 2005 disaster: “The richness and diversity of points of view in the Jewish community really became clear to us when Jewish college groups started arriving.” He said that his experience working side-by-side with Jews motivated him to want to provide some balance to the Israel report.

Many synagogues across the U.S. already host homeless shelters and soup kitchens.

**8. Jewish groups should increasingly arrange community events that involve leaders and lay people of other religions in shared activities, such as Thanksgiving services, community Seders, forums, Earth Day events, World Peace Day gatherings, etc.**

We should take advantage of such opportunities to show that we are part of the community, sharing common values and willing to cooperate.

\* \* \*

In summary, instead of looking at antisemitism as something that has always occurred and will always occur no matter what we do, we should realize that there are many ways to reduce it that also have many other benefits, such as building bridges of understanding between ourselves and the other peoples of the world.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 1, endnote 2, for why I prefer this modern spelling.

<sup>2</sup> More information about the Global Marshall Plan proposal is at [http://www.spiritualprogressives.org/article.php/gmp\\_one](http://www.spiritualprogressives.org/article.php/gmp_one)

<sup>3</sup> Gershom, Yonassan, “After September 11,” *Eight Candles of Consciousness: Essays on Jewish Nonviolence*, Lulu Press, Inc., New York, 2009, pp. 91-92.

## *The Souls of a Million Children*



Protest banner at a rally in Washington, DC, June 10, 2007, sponsored by United for Peace and Justice and US Campaign to End the Occupation. Many recent opinion polls show that the continued occupation of the West Bank by Israel is resulting in a rise of antisemitism worldwide. Chapter 4 discusses how a resolution of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict can help reduce antisemitism.



## Chapter 5

### Should Diaspora Jews speak out about Israeli policies?

*For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a burning torch. — Isaiah 62: 1-2*

*If I forget you, O Jerusalem let my right hand wither. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joys. — Psalms 137:5-6*

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; may those who love her prosper. May there be peace within her walls, prosperity within her palaces. For the sake of my brethren and friends, I shall speak of peace within her midst. For the sake of the House of the Compassionate One, our God, I will seek her good. — Psalms 122: 6-9*

As the above quotations remind us, Jews have always cherished Israel. Even when stateless and dispersed throughout the world, Jews constantly yearned to return to *Eretz Yisrael* (the land of Israel). The prayer “Next Year in Jerusalem,” recited at the close of Yom Kippur services and Passover Seders, became an axiomatic byword among the Jewish people. Now that the state of Israel exists, Jews consider her as the

fulfillment of a once-elusive dream: a homeland where Jewish tradition and values can be applied, and a beacon for the world.

I love Israel and am happy to call myself a Zionist. I am proud of Israel's amazing accomplishments in its short existence in many areas, including agriculture, education, law, social integration, technology, education, Torah study, human services, and academics, and I pray they will continue and grow.

I have two daughters living in Israel along with their husbands and my grandchildren, including one who is now (November 2012) serving in the Israeli Defense Forces. My wife and I visit often, generally twice a year for Passover and Sukkot, as well as for special occasions, such as brisses (circumcisions of baby boys), bar and bat mitzvahs, and *b'sha'ah tovah* (at the proper times in the future, God willing) weddings.

Whenever I go to Israel to visit family, I frequently give talks about Jewish teachings on vegetarianism, environmentalism, animal rights, and related issues, and I try to meet with environmentalists, vegetarian leaders, rabbis, and other influential people. The documentary that I helped produce, *A Sacred Duty: Applying Jewish Values to Help Heal the World*, contains significant material about environmental issues in Israel. I was a Green Zionist Alliance (GZA) party delegate to the World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem in June 2010, and I was the GZA liaison to the media, environmentalists, rabbis, and other contacts in Israel prior to the Congress. I believe that for Israel's sake, Judaism's sake, and the world's sake, a frank, respectful, loving assessment of Israel's policies and its best future strategy is essential.

This chapter and the next one have been especially hard for me to write because they contain ideas that are not part of the common wisdom shared by some members of my family, many friends, most members of my modern Orthodox congregation, and many other Jews, especially Orthodox Jews. But I have become convinced that it is essential that these issues be addressed, because I believe, as discussed in the next chapter, that peace is essential to Israel's survival and well being and the well being of the entire world.

I recognize that Israel's very existence since 1948 has been one of constant struggle and that there are forces in the

world that wish to totally destroy her. As I write these words in March 2010, the horrible scenes of the recent terrorist act near the Central Bus Station in Jerusalem are fresh in my mind. And this only a short time after the horrendous murder of five members of the Fogel family, including a three-month old baby girl, in Itamar. I think that, very unfortunately, such events and possibly even worse are likely to continue unless Israel can find a way to work out a settlement of the current conflict, as discussed in the next chapter.

This is certainly not meant to justify terrorism. I strongly oppose all acts of terrorism and believe that there is never a justification for it. However, because I love Israel, I am very concerned about the direction in which she is heading. “An open rebuke is better than hidden love.” (Proverbs 27:5) The Biblical prophets rebuked Israel, not out of hatred or abuse, but out deep love and of sincere concern. Although I am far from being on the level of a prophet, I try to take the prophets as my role models, as did Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. I speak out against injustices precisely because I love Israel and care deeply about the future of the Jewish people.

Rather than supporting everything Israel does, I think it is more important to try to get her back on the right track, in a loving and respectful way, when we think she has gotten off it. And there is much in the Jewish tradition that supports this approach. In chapter 2 we already discussed many Jewish teachings on involvement and protest.

## **Demonization or dialogue?**

I have found that there are, roughly speaking, two kinds of people when it comes to politics. The vast majority of people see things in terms of good and evil, black and white, “us versus them.” Many of them delight in demonizing people who are not in their camp and in scoring debating points. The more negative things they can find about their opponents — whether they be Arabs or Jews, Republicans or Democrats, blacks or whites, Orthodox or Reform, hawks or doves — the more powerful and self-righteous they feel. They generally speak only to others from their own group, listen to commentators who reinforce their own views, and read material consistent with their outlooks. The second type of people, by far the

minority, while aware of realities and difficulties, seek to find common ground and solutions. Of course, nobody is completely of one type or the other, but I think most people have strong tendencies in one direction or the other.

Rabbi Yonassan Gershom told me that years ago, when he was studying with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi in Philadelphia, they performed an exercise where people would stand in a circle and chant the words “us and them.” First the rabbi would have everyone place the emphasis on the “us” and the “them,” which focused the energy on separation and opposites: “*us* and *them*.” Then he would change the rhythm to put the emphasis on the “and”—“us *and* them.” Without changing the words at all, the chant suddenly became one of inclusiveness and cooperation because the focus changed. This powerful experience that Rabbi Gershom outlined epitomizes what I think we need to do regarding the Middle East and life in general. Instead of living in adversarial mode, we need to somehow find a way to move into a mode of conciliation and cooperation.

Judaism has traditionally been based on reconciling opposites. There is a basic principle of Torah interpretation that says: When two verses seem to contradict each other, a third verse will come to reconcile them. Judaism teaches us to listen to all sides of an argument, and then try to find a way to reconcile them. But in recent decades, we seem to have lost this principle.

Of course, this doesn’t mean that there is nothing about the Palestinians to be critical of, or that one should be unnecessarily critical of one’s own people or nation. What it does imply is that we should recognize our own faults as well as those of others and seek common ground and solutions rather than to just win debates. Unless we can open our minds enough to listen to each other, we will never have peace.

Rabbi Gershom’s anecdote about people in a circle chanting “*us* and *them*” and then “us *and* them” reminded me of one of my favorite poems by Edwin Markham called “Outwitted”:

He drew a circle that shut me out;  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout;  
But love and I had the wit to win;

We drew a circle that took him in.

Imagine if this response to a difficulty were what most people practiced. What a far more tolerant, harmonious, and peaceful world it would be! But most people seem to be living in the adversarial mode, the “*us versus them*” mode, a mode that shuts people out rather than drawing them in.

To most of my fellow congregants and many other Orthodox Jews, Israel is almost beyond criticism, the world is generally against Israel, and the Palestinians and other Arabs represent evil forces that must be completely and unequivocally opposed. The believe that Palestinians and other Arabs are so devious and so evil that it is impossible to even consider negotiating with them. All news reports that reinforce this view are widely shared with others, and any reports of potential cooperation and progress are downplayed or ignored. They circulate material via email that puts Israel in the best possible light, immune from criticism, and puts the Palestinians, other Arabs, and Muslims in general in the worst possible light.

Often the information in these emails about Muslims is completely false. For example, several times I have received email messages claiming that the United Kingdom has banned Holocaust studies in its schools, to avoid offending Muslims. A quick check on [Snopes.com](http://Snopes.com) — a website that investigates rumors on the Internet — reveals the falsity of this assertion. I have also several times received the same type of false message about the University of Kentucky dropping Holocaust studies, probably because it also has the initials UK, same as the United Kingdom. Again, this is not true: the university still offers a course called “History 323: The Holocaust.”

The widespread transmission of such false rumors makes a meaningful dialogue on solutions to real problems far more difficult. And as a people mandated to be “a light unto the nations,” we Jews must accept a real responsibility to take special care to not bear false witness. I think a quick minute or two invested on Google or Snopes to confirm or refute a story’s validity is a reasonable expectation.

For many, the possibility of dialogue and other forms of cooperation are seldom if ever considered. I have been a member of my Modern Orthodox synagogue since 1968, and in all those years I have heard only one speaker stress the

importance of reconciliation and peace in the Middle East. That person was permitted to speak only because he is the son-in-law of one of the synagogue members. He was not permitted to speak in the main sanctuary to the whole congregation, but was relegated to a smaller room, to which people had to move after a Shabbat service. That meant a much smaller audience. And he received very strong criticisms of his positions, although he spoke with the moral authority and credentials of having served in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and having had a brother-in-law die in one of Israel's wars.

By contrast, many speakers at my synagogue have spoken about how Israel is threatened by terrorism and other Arab actions, about Jewish suffering, about how we must be strong, stand by Israel, protest to U.S. governmental officials, and support everything Israel does — especially the West Bank settlers. Of course these issues should be discussed and Israel should be defended, but there should also be discussions of the possibilities of resolving disputes by peaceful means. I have not attended every talk at my synagogue, of course, but I do know that the overwhelming preponderance of talks and literature available for pickup on Israel take hard-line positions and there is little, if any, desire to have other points of view presented.

It is ironic that Israelis themselves criticize their government far more openly than American Jews are allowed to do in their own communities. Newspapers in Israel regularly carry critical articles that would seldom if ever get into American publications. There are sometimes major demonstrations for peace and justice in Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities. The late Israeli Major General Matti Peled once noted, "The United States is making Israel less and less secure by encouraging the reckless agenda of the Israeli right."<sup>1</sup>

Not only does the Israeli press openly criticize their own government, they are sometimes frustrated that Americans so idealize it. There are daily articles in the Israeli press that are critical of various Israeli policies. To me there is something seriously wrong when we are asked to support Israel but can't take into consideration the critical opinions which Israelis express in their own newspapers.

In spite of the supportive views of most Israelis and most American Jews for a two-state solution, as repeatedly expressed

in polls, most members of my synagogue are strongly opposed to any territorial compromises for the sake of a possible peace agreement. During the Oslo talks, one guest speaker at my synagogue stated that we should not be concerned about a proposed peace settlement involving withdrawing from much of the West Bank, because Israelis were taking over many hilltops in that area, which would make a territorial compromise very difficult. As far as I know, there was no objection to that statement or other statements over many years that have downplayed the possibility of peace and/or encouraged steps that would make resolving the conflict more difficult.

The difficulties American Jews face in being lovingly critical of Israeli policies was discussed in an op-ed article in the December 9, 2010 New York Times “The ‘Real Jews’ Debate” by *New York Times* liberal columnist Roger Cohen;

The view that American Jews supportive of Israel but critical of its policies are not “real Jews” is, however, widespread. Israel-right-or-wrong continues to be the core approach of major U.S. Jewish organizations, from the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) to the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

To oppose the continued expansion of settlements in the West Bank... or question growing anti-Arab bigotry as personified by Israel’s rightist foreign minister and illustrated by the “loyalty oath” debate, or ask whether the “de-legitimization” of Israel might not have something to do with its own actions is to incur these organizations’ steady ire.

In his op-ed, Roger Cohen quotes Jeremy Ben-Ami, president of J Street, the organization whose slogan is “The political home for pro-Israel, pro-peace Americans”: “These organizations’ view remains essentially that any time you engage in an activity critical of Israel you are trying to destroy the state of Israel. Here are all these Jewish kids being raised on great liberal values at Hebrew schools — walks for the homeless, Darfur, AIDS — but God forbid we talk about what’s happening in Israel! It’s a dynamic that cuts off discourse.”

Recently a film was shown at my synagogue, entitled

*Crossing the Line: The Intifada Comes to Campus.* It showed very dramatically the great increase in anti-Israel and anti-American activities at several American and Canadian campuses and the difficulties several Israeli representatives have had getting their messages out without strong heckling from Muslim students. It is disgraceful and wrong that such bias and disruptions are happening, and certainly Jews and others should be aware of what is occurring on our college campuses and in other places. It is also important to counter antisemitism and unfair criticisms of Israel. But along with their benefits, such films also project an all-or-nothing, black or white picture that allows for no nuance or complexity. There is no attempt at balance, nor to point out the many issues on which Jews and Muslims are cooperating, nor to consider steps that might reduce such hostilities and confrontation.

As I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter, a positive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is vital for Israel, Jews worldwide, Palestinians and other Arabs, the United States and, indeed, the entire world. There are many obstacles to a just peace, including Arab intransigence and promotion of hatred toward Jews and Israel, but I believe that these problems can be solved. Any ultimate agreement must firmly assure Israel's security. Israelis will of course make the final decisions about Israeli policies, but they should consider the potential effects of their actions on Jews throughout the world.

## **Intolerance at the World Zionist Congress**

I personally witnessed an example of the failure of Jews to engage in respectful dialogue when I was a Green Zionist Alliance (GZA) delegate to the World Zionist Congress in Jerusalem in June 2010. Because a GZA resolution was considered in the committee that dealt with settlement issues in Israel, I was assigned to that committee. When the first two resolutions, supporting a settlement freeze, endorsing a two-state solution, and calling for the Israeli government to repair relations with the American government, were approved, hard-liners noisily left the committee meeting. Some shouted ugly insults on the way out, such as calling Jews who voted for the resolutions "Hamis/Obama supporters."<sup>2</sup>



To their credit, most of the Zionist Congress members of the committee avoided such name-calling. People on both sides of these issues urged those walking out to stay, but to no avail. Even the committee chairperson, a member of the hawkish Israeli party *Yisrael Beiteinu* (Israel, Our Home) left, ironically leaving the chairing of the remainder of the meeting to his co-chair Hadar Susskind, Vice President of Policy and Strategy of the dovish J Street.

To the credit of Susskind and the other remaining progressive committee members, who now had an even greater majority after the hard-liner walkout, they conducted a respectful, well-reasoned dialogue on the remaining resolutions. They sought to reach common ground, making changes and dropping some statements, as urged by opponents of the more liberal resolutions. As Hadar Susskind put it in his J Street blog:

With progressive delegates outnumbering those representing pro-occupation parties, the committee could have easily descended further into the political abyss by ramming through resolutions and not taking into account the deeply held views of all in the room. We took a different tack, recognizing that chairing this committee was an opportunity to demonstrate to the Congress and the Committee that it was possible to have a serious, fact-based, and frank discussion on these incredibly contentious issues.

The situation became even worse at the final plenary, when all the delegates voted on the resolutions. When the voting on the first resolution of the settlements committee again went against the wishes of the more hawkish delegates by a very decisive margin, many of them angrily got up on the stage and sang *Hatikvah* (the Israeli national anthem) at the top of their lungs as a form of protest. They ignored calls to step down and to permit the democratic voting to continue. One member of the conservative Shas Party shouted out, “North Tel Aviv and North America have betrayed the State of Israel!” This almost precipitated a serious confrontation, but, luckily, cooler heads prevailed. However, the unruly protest effectively shut down the voting process, and the Resolutions Committee

decided to halt the proceedings and refer all remaining resolutions to a later meeting of the Zionist General Council.

After the protesters left the stage, two young delegates from opposing political perspectives spoke to the plenum and sharply criticized the protesters for not living up to Theodore Herzl's dreams for respectful discussion and decision-making by Congress delegates. This and an additional statement, very critical of the protesters by the leader of the Meretz delegation, received loud applause by the majority of the delegates.

The strong disagreements at the conference were summed up in an op-ed article, "We Have Met the Enemy..." in the July 2 issue of the New York *Jewish Week* by Rabbi Gerald Skolnik, a Conservative rabbi from Forest Hills, Queens. He wrote:

As we approach Tisha b'Av, it is worth remembering what the rabbis taught long ago. The Romans destroyed the Second Temple in the year 70 CE because of *sin'at chinam* — senseless hatred among the Jews of that time that undermined their ability to effectively combat the Roman threat.

Based on some of the behaviors that I witnessed during the Congress, I have to wonder if the senseless hatred among the Jews of our time will undermine our own ability to deal with the very real threats to Israel and the Zionist cause in the 21st century...

It is with the greatest of sadness that I, more than once or twice, actually felt hated by some of my fellow Jews precisely because of the beliefs that I hold. And that, I think, is what has left me so unsettled in the aftermath of the recent Zionist Congress...

When you have developed the capacity to countenance this kind of behavior without being horrified, something is terribly wrong. These are critical times for the Zionist enterprise. The Zionist ship is listing badly, taking on water, and mighty cannons are firing at it from all directions. We need to be talking about the issues that are facing Israel, not hurling insults at those who raise them.

## **Smearing progressive Jewish groups**

Recently, even groups that were created specifically to support Israel have been demonized if they don't blindly adhere to the right-wing agenda.

The New Israel Fund (NIF), whose motto is "Promoting Equality for All Israelis," strives for democratic change in Israel and for a state where all its citizens have equal rights, regardless of their religion, race, gender, or sexual orientation. Seeking to build a progressive Israeli society since their inception in 1979, they have provided over \$200 million to over 800 grassroots Israeli organizations that are dedicated to social justice, equality, human rights, and tolerance.

I think NIF's values and approaches are commendable. Like the NIF itself, I do not necessarily agree with every position and action of all of the many groups they support, but I think their net effect is very positive for Israel. However, there are right-wing Israelis and Diaspora Jews who oppose NIF's support for groups that advocate territorial compromises for a two-state solution, improved Israeli/Palestinian relations, an end to gratuitous settler harassment of Palestinians, greater recognition of non-Orthodox groups, and other causes. Because of this, the NIF has become a target of efforts to stifle dissent and muzzle the Israeli human rights community.

These efforts include a smear campaign by a new Israeli right -wing group *Im Tirtzu* ("If You Will It") and a failed effort in the Israeli Knesset to establish a "commission of inquiry" to investigate NIF, both based on claims that some of the groups supported by NIF provided damaging information to the Goldstone Commission, which issued a report critical of Israeli (and Palestinian) actions during the January, 2010 war in Gaza.

The weekly column of NIF Chair Naomi Chazan in the *Jerusalem Post* was discontinued, even though she received no money from the newspaper for writing it. Gershon Baskin, a long-time Israeli peace activist, stated in an article in the *Jerusalem Post*: "The witch-hunt against Chazan and the New Israel Fund is reminiscent of the darkest days of McCarthyism in the United States and similar to the atmosphere of states with secret police forces and dark dungeons."

Fortunately, there has been worldwide support for the NIF, and this was a factor behind the Knesset inquiry not going forward. Many Israeli leaders from many political perspectives indicated opposition to what they viewed as a witch-hunt

against progressive Israeli organizations. Many in the progressive U.S. Jewish community came to NIF's defense. For example, Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, issued a statement saying, "In their twisted attribution of blame for the Goldstone Report to the NIF, these attackers are trying to de-legitimize the New Israel Fund in much the same way that the Goldstone Report is being used to de-legitimize Israel in the eyes of the world."

NIF Chair Naomi Chazan argued that there is no direct correlation between the positions of the Fund and those of the grantees. "We really don't support every single thing these organizations say, but we support their right to say it. Some organizations' only sin was signing a call to set up an independent committee of inquiry [related to the Goldstone report]."

### **Positive efforts to further understand the other's narrative**

Fortunately, some college professors and others are trying to make peace more likely by exploring each side's narrative and by searching for common ground. Professor Mark Rosenblum, founder of Americans For Peace Now, teaches a course on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at Queens College that both Jews and Muslims attend. As part of the class, each student must research and make a report from the perspective of the other side. This has resulted in a much greater appreciation of the other side's outlook by many of the participating students.

Another example is a course team-taught at Brandeis University by three scholars: an Israeli, an Egyptian and a Palestinian. At a time when many Middle Eastern Studies courses have been accused of bias, this course challenges students to discuss controversial issues in a respectful way. The professors are trying to prove that it is possible to consider the complex issues without promoting a cause or consistently blaming one side or the other.

Dr. Irwin J. (Yitzchak) Mansdorf has taught and directed a program in Israel-Arab studies at Midreshet Lindenbaum in Jerusalem for the past 5 years. In a letter in the December 24, 2010 New York *Jewish Week*, he states that the focus is on presenting "both sides" and says that the approach works. He

indicates that, unlike pure advocacy approaches, “we emphasize activism through empathy, which translates into having a thorough and complete understanding of the Palestinian Arab viewpoint.” His post-high school students meet and learn from Palestinian Arabs and achieve some insight into the Palestinian Arabs experience. These students later take on major leadership positions on campuses in the U.S., England, and Canada.

When we are willing to listen to the narratives — the life stories — of the other side, we often find that we can identify with them more than we expected. Unfortunately, the only kinds of contact that some Palestinians have with Israelis is at checkpoints, where they are not always treated respectfully. An exhaustive collection of testimonies of 700 Israeli soldiers about such behavior is in the publication with the understated title, *Occupation of the Territories*, produced by the group “Breaking the Silence,” that also maintain a website, speaks widely, and appears in videos and on C-Span.

Even though such horrible behavior is a comparatively infrequent and unauthorized aberration, it still breeds anger and resentment among Palestinians, as it would among Jews if we were subjected to such treatment. Of course there are also many examples of improper Palestinian actions against Jews, including terrorist acts, but mistreating mostly innocent Palestinians is not the solution to the problem.

The vast majority of Israelis certainly do not behave improperly to Palestinians and many Israelis denounce and actively oppose such behavior. As a matter of fact, many Palestinians receive excellent care in Israeli hospitals. This includes not only Israeli Arabs but also Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza. But the harsh treatment that does occur often overshadows such positive actions, creates frustration and anger, and poisons all relationships. As I stated before, and want to re-emphasize now, there is absolutely no justification for terrorist acts that target innocent people, including women and children. But we must recognize the rage and desire for revenge that sometimes trigger such acts and do what we can to minimize unnecessary antagonism.

**Right-wing opposition to American groups promoting Middle Eastern peace**

For many years I have supported efforts to find common ground and solutions that would help end the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. I was involved in many U.S. groups seeking peace over the years, including *Breira* (“Alternative,” a name chosen in contrast to the Hebrew phrase *ein breirah*, “there is no alternative”), New Jewish Agenda, and, most recently, J Street. All of them met strong opposition from the Jewish establishment.

For example, although *Breira* had the participation of over a hundred rabbis, as well as noted American Jewish writers and intellectuals, the Jewish establishment subjected the group to a vicious McCarthy-like smear campaign. Rabbi Alexander Schindler, then president of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, was perhaps the only major leader of a Jewish organization to defend *Breira*, calling the attacks on the group and the firings by major Jewish organizations of some of its rabbinic supporters “a witch hunt,” one which eventually led to *Breira*’s dissolution by 1977. Similar attacks were made against New Jewish Agenda and are currently targeting J Street.

J Street, the largest active group currently supporting a two-state solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, considers itself the political home for pro-Israel, pro-peace Americans." According to J Street’s website:

The organization gives political voice to mainstream American Jews and other supporters of Israel who, informed by their Jewish values, believe that a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is essential to Israel’s survival as the national home of the Jewish people and as a vibrant democracy. J Street’s mission is two-fold: first, to advocate for urgent American diplomatic leadership to achieve a two-state solution and a broader regional, comprehensive peace and, second, to ensure a broad debate on Israel and the Middle East in national politics and the American Jewish community.

Unfortunately, the Jewish establishment has generally been successful in portraying peace groups that promote Israeli/Palestinian reconciliation as outside the mainstream and/or anti-Israel. To many Jews, being pro-Israel today means

supporting the most conservative, hawkish elements in Israel. As indicated, J Street's slogan is "Pro-Israel and Pro-Peace." But to many Jews, anyone who supports territorial compromise in pursuit of peace and does not support the most hawkish positions can't be considered pro-Israel, simply because they don't fit into a narrow right-wing agenda.

As will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter, *Oz v'Shalom/Netivot Shalom*, an Israeli Orthodox peace group, warned years ago that trying to control another people would be counterproductive and lead to great problems in the future, but their voice went unheeded. Yet we see today that they were right. The more we try to control the Palestinians, the more they resist the occupation.

Once again, I believe that the highest form of loyalty is challenging your nation or your group to live up to its highest standards. To repeat the insight from Proverbs, "An open rebuke is better than hidden love." Blindly supporting Israel in all of her actions is not really helping her; it is enabling destructive behavior that, in the long run, is detrimental to Israel's survival. Yet it seems that, while it is acceptable for Americans to be critical of US actions, such as our involvements in Vietnam (including atrocities and massive napalming), Central America (including "death squads" and Iran-Contra), and Iraq (with the discredited rationale, mistreatment of prisoners, and unforeseen consequences, including strengthening Iran), the same is not true when it comes to Israel. When one disagrees with the conventional "wisdom" formulated by the most conservative elements in Jewish life today, and advocates other possible directions for Israel, one is immediately declared "out of bounds." Many will then label you an antisemite or a self-hating Jew.

## **Efforts to smear J Street**

There are other examples in the United States of recent attempts by conservative individuals and groups to silence dissent about Israeli policies. J Street director Jeremy Ben-Ami was scheduled to speak in November 2010 at Temple Beth Avodah in Newton, a Boston suburb, but a small group of Jewish right-wing activists intimidated the board into cancelling the event. When the cancellation was initially announced, a

“We Will Not Be Silenced” petition was created in response and obtained over 10,000 signatures in ten hours.

Ben-Ami ended up speaking at a nearby school to a large, enthusiastic audience. When he told them that thousands of people had signed a petition expressing opposition to the intimidation of communal leaders that is intended to silence their voices, the crowd applauded loudly.

The event received widespread local publicity. Public Radio in Boston (WBUR) led with the story; the Boston Jewish Community Relations Council defended J Street’s right to speak; the *Boston Globe* carried favorable commentary; and there was a positive editorial in the local *Jewish Advocate*. The Temple’s rabbi expressed support for open dialogue and regretted that a small group of Temple members had been able to prevent the talk at the Temple.

Unfortunately, the cancellation of Jeremy Ben-Ami’s talk is not an isolated example. All across the U.S, small numbers of hawkish activists and donors regularly intimidate synagogues, Hillels, and other communal institutions into stifling the presentation of views on Israel they don’t approve of.<sup>3</sup>

The “We Will Not Be Silenced” petition has been kept open, to support other peace activists who are fighting similar battles to get their messages out. Promoters of the petition want others who run into the stonewall of resistance “to be able to say that they are not alone — that thousands upon thousands of pro-Israel, pro-peace Americans want our voices heard in the communal and national conversation on Israel,” so that incidents like the one near Boston will never happen again.

After the news about the cancellation broke, there were heartening examples of community support for freedom of speech. Alan S. Ronkin, deputy director of the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) in Boston, wrote, “It’s deeply troubling that there are people in the community who would prefer to stifle debate, rather than engage.” Jesse Singal at the *Boston Globe* wrote, “If a mere conversation featuring the head of a group that has become, for better or worse, part of the mainstream conversation on Israel would ‘threaten the fabric of the congregation,’ it says more about the congregation than it does about J Street.”



In February 2009, five US Congressmen were snubbed during a visit to Israel and denied meetings with some Israeli officials, because their visit was sponsored by J Street. While the Israeli foreign ministry quickly apologized for this astonishing diplomatic blunder, it signifies a mindset and a continuing problem.

In another example of increasing disapproval of dissenting opinions, Abby Backer, a Columbia University student and the daughter of a Wisconsin rabbi, recounted what occurred at a debate about Israel at Temple Beth El in Stamford, Connecticut, between the activist lawyer Alan Dershowitz and J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami. In her Opinion essay, “Exclude Me At Your Own Peril,”<sup>4</sup> she wrote that her experience at the debate made her feel like a “stranger within my own community.”

Backer, who was present as a student leader of Just Peace, the J Street University affiliate at Columbia University, described how Ben-Ami was hissed, the J Street staff was booed, and, after the contentious debate was over, an elderly woman confronted Backer in the synagogue lobby. “I should spit on you!” the heckler yelled. “Are you a Palestinian? You must be a Palestinian!” In her op-ed essay, Backer wrote:

I have given much thought over the last week about whether I can continue to be part of this conversation. If I am not welcome, why [should I] bother to fight for entry?... What was it that proved so horrifying to that woman and those that hissed at Ben-Ami? Was it his statement that all Jews should be troubled by the conditions of Palestinians living under occupation? Was it his insistence that placing of blame on one side or the other is counterproductive? Was it his defense of students, like me, who are concerned about the occupation, but fear that honesty will put them on the periphery of our community?

Coincidentally (or maybe not), there was a reference in the same issue of *The Jewish Week* by editor Gary Rosenblatt, in a column entitled, “Exploring The Generation Gap Among Jewish Leaders,” that served to reinforce Becker’s message. It described a study by the Avi Chai Foundation that found that

Jews in their 20s and 30s who are leaders of “non-establishment” Jewish groups in America are critical of establishment institutions for not welcoming diversity and for not permitting younger Jews to have input.

Those who are lamenting the loss of Jewish youth to assimilation, or who wonder why fewer and fewer younger Jews are joining the mainstream institutions, would do well to listen to the voices of those youth. Excluding them from the conversation only reinforces Backer’s impression that they are not welcome in the Jewish community. In rejecting these student activists, we may well be driving away the next generation.

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## Notes for Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup> “The Swing to the Right in U.S. Policy Toward Israel and Palestine,” THE FREE LIBRARY

<http://www.thefreelibrary.com/The+swing+to+the+right+in+U.S.+Policy+to+ward+Israel+and+Palestine.-a091660177>

<sup>2</sup> Hamas is the right-wing Palestinian party in power in Gaza as of this writing. It is important to note here that President Obama has never supported or endorsed Hamas or its policies. Obama, like other presidents before him, has repeatedly called upon Hamas to renounce terrorism, recognize Israel’s right to exist, and engage in the peace process – which Hamas has repeatedly rejected.

<sup>3</sup> There have also been terrible cases of Muslim students disrupting talks by Israeli officials and pro-Israel speakers. Hopefully there will soon be a just resolution of the Middle East conflict so that such disruptions by activists on both sides of the conflict will end.

<sup>4</sup> Oct. 29, 2010, NY *Jewish Week*

*Should Diaspora Jews speak out about Israeli policies?*



Students at the University of East Anglia (United Kingdom) protesting the IDF attack on a flotilla attempting to bring humanitarian supplies and aid through the Israeli blockade of Gaza on March 31, 2010. Other protests against the Israeli response to the flotilla occurred in Israel and many other countries. A solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict would prevent future flotillas and other similar confrontations.



Members of Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) carry their “End the Occupation” banner in an anti-war march in Seattle, Washington, on October 27, 2007. The next chapter discusses why an end to the occupation is so important, and the many benefits of a two-state solution to Israel and the world. (For more on JVP and the controversies surrounding them, see page 99, note 4.)

## *Who Stole My Religion?*



Anti-Hamas peace rally in London, January 11, 2009.



A Pro-Israel rally in London, 2006, calls for an end to terrorist attacks.

## Chapter 6

### How can we seek peace for Israel?

*It shall come to pass in the latter day... that out of Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem... — Isaiah 2:2-3*

*And I will bring back the captivity of My people Israel, and they shall build the wasted cities, and dwell therein; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink their wine; and they shall lay out gardens and eat their fruit.*  
— Amos 9

*Until Israelis and Palestinians are able to listen to each other, hear each other's anguish and anger and make cognitive space for one another's hopes, there is no way forward.* — UK Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks<sup>1</sup>

The previous chapter addressed why it is so important that Jews be concerned about Israel, and to lovingly and respectfully speak out when they think Israel's policies are counterproductive. This chapter considers why a just, comprehensive, sustainable, mutually-agreed-upon resolution of Middle East conflicts is essential and will have many benefits for Israel, the US, and indeed the entire world.

Let me first make it clear that I am fully aware of past intransigence in the Arab world. I know that hatred of Jews and Holocaust denial are taught in many Muslim schools, and that

some governments and violent factions refuse to acknowledge Israel's right to exist. The many outrageous acts of terrorism by Palestinians must be condemned and prevented. However, since I am a Jew speaking primarily to fellow Jews, I want to focus on what I believe we, as Jews, should be doing to work for peace. There are some Palestinians who want peace, and others who view Israel as just as intransigent as many Jews view the Palestinians. Instead of each side further demonizing the other, we need to seek common ground and ways to overcome obstacles to peace.

### **An important Israeli peace group: Oz V'Shalom/Netivot Shalom**

Rather than offer my own opinions as an American Jew on peace issues in Israel, I will base my case largely on the views of the Israeli Orthodox peace group Oz V'Shalom/Netivot Shalom (the Movement for Judaism, Zionism and Peace).

The phrase *oz v'shalom* literally means “Strength and Peace” — and that makes a very important point. Pursuing peace is not an indication of weakness. Israel can and must remain strong while, at the same time, seeking peaceful solutions to conflicts.

Oz v'Shalom was founded in 1975 to present an alternative, more moderate expression of religious Zionism. They later merged with Netivot Shalom (Paths of Peace), which was formed after the 1982 war in Lebanon, in which a disproportionate number of religious students who combined their military duty with studies at *Hesder* yeshivas were killed. This, in turn, caused their teachers and others to question the direction that Zionism was going, and take a stronger stance for peace.

The name Oz v'Shalom was taken from Psalm 29:11: “God will grant His people strength (*oz*); God will bless his people with peace (*shalom*).” The name Netivot Shalom was taken from Proverbs 3:17: “(The Torah's) ways are pleasant, and all her paths (*netivot*) are peace (*shalom*).” The two organizations combined because both are Orthodox groups committed to promoting the ideals of justice, tolerance, and pluralism — concepts central to Jewish tradition and law. For

the sake of brevity here, I shall refer to them collectively as Oz v'Shalom.

This movement originally began with a group of Orthodox Jewish academics who were alarmed by the growing militarism and intolerance they saw in much of the religious Zionist community. They became aware that religious fundamentalism was gaining hold throughout the region on both the Arab and Jewish sides and represented a major threat to coexistence. They believed that any effective counter argument in the religious community must also be based on authentic Jewish tradition. And they were convinced that the established religious Zionist camp had drifted away from the values that had been its initial foundation. Unfortunately, this tendency has only increased since the 1970s.

As a religious Zionist peace organization, Oz v'Shalom is in a unique position to counter fundamentalist and extremist political arguments that they believe have placed the value of possessing the Land of Israel ahead of other vital Torah values, such as human life, justice, and peace — concerns that have always been central to Jewish law and tradition.

Because they are committed to Jewish tradition and law, while at the same time supporting peace, equality, and co-existence, Oz v'Shalom is able to enter into a dialogue with both the secular left and the religious right. They seek to effect a fundamental change within the entire national religious community and throughout Israeli society by endeavoring in the words of their mission statement to:

- Demonstrate support for the peace process on the basis of political reality and justice;
- Enhance Jewish unity and pluralism among Israel's religious and secular communities;
- Practice coexistence and support for equality for Israel's Arab minority;
- Advocate political rights for Palestinians and work toward the establishment of a Palestinian state;

Oz v'Shalom argues that the Jewish people's special relationship towards the Land of Israel should not override the preservation of Jewish lives (as well as others). They view the pursuit of peace as a central religious value and believe that Jews have a religious obligation as a nation to seek and pursue peace. They believe that Jewish law clearly requires us to establish a fair and just society, and that attempting to achieve co-existence between Jews and Arabs is not merely an option, but an imperative.

**Oz v'Shalom sees the pursuit of peace as a political necessity, a religious duty, and an ethical obligation.** They understand political reality and the necessity to require territorial compromise as part of any plan to achieve lasting peace between Israel and the Arabs. The State of Israel's survival and success take precedence over the desire to maintain control over *Eretz Yisrael Hashleimah*, "Greater Israel," including the West Bank. Therefore, they advocate making the painful concession of parts of the Land of Israel so that the State of Israel might live in peace with her neighbors. They believe that a peace settlement based on territorial compromise is necessary to realize the values of religious Zionism, which are the preservation of the Jewish character of Israeli society and the maintenance of the highest ethical standards. And they stress that their daily lives and the political life of Israel must be guided by the biblical verse "And you shall do what is right and good in the eyes of God" (Deuteronomy 6:18) and the Talmudic principle *mipnei darchei shalom* ("for the sake of peace").

Oz V'Shalom believes that lasting peace can only be achieved when the basic needs and aspirations of both peoples are met, with each side acting in consideration of the ideals and constraints of the other. They quote Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the leading modern Orthodox rabbinic authority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

Saving the life of a single Israeli young man takes precedence over the entire Torah. The Jewish law regarding saving lives must be taken into account when dealing with politics. There are now many who call for giving up not an inch of the land of Israel, who think not, that for our intransigence we may pay a dear price in human lives. The notion that the Messiah



must come at the high cost of human blood opposes the breath and spirit of Jewish law... In matters of territories, politics, *and* saving lives, the recognized experts are the army and the Israeli government. If they find that it is possible to give up territories without endangering lives in the community or the state's very existence, then they (the secular authorities) must be listened to.<sup>2</sup>

Oz v'Shalom also points out that continuing to rule over a nationally conscious Arab population is a threat to the internal welfare and ethical character of Israel. They stress that if Israel continues the way she has been going, she will be faced with the choice of either annexing the West Bank permanently and giving its inhabitants full citizenship (which would create an Arab majority and destroy Israel's Jewish character), or continuing to oppress an entire population as second-class citizens and becoming an apartheid state (which would destroy Israel's ethical character). Neither of these is a viable option. Both would be the end of Israel as a Jewish, democratic, honorable nation (as former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert, Kadima leader Tzipi Livni, and others have also warned.)

So, while acknowledging that it takes two sides to make peace, Oz V'Shalom believes that Israel is responsible for forging and advancing a vision of a Jewish state and for acting in pursuit of that vision. They see the choice as between:

- A Jewish state governed by Biblical values, just laws, and reason — *or* a garrison state characterized by chauvinism, institutionalized injustice, and xenophobia;
- A democratic society, flourishing within smaller borders, in which the Arab minority enjoys full human dignity and civil rights — *or* all of Eretz Yisrael [the land of Israel] at the price of repressing the political freedom of well over one million Palestinian Arabs;
- Mutual recognition and co-existence between Israelis and Palestinians — *or* escalating destruction and loss of life.<sup>3</sup>

As Oz v'Shalom outlines these stark choices, it becomes clear that it is long past time that we move beyond the current impasse and start using our wisdom and resources to seek a long-lasting solution that will be of enormous benefit for Israel, the Jewish people, the Palestinian people, and all of humanity. Recently Oz v'Shalom has been less active, mainly producing literature, but its essential message of peace and justice is needed more than ever before.

### **Why Peace is so important for Israel**

Peace in the Middle East is critically necessary for Israel's future, and Jewish communities should make the pursuit of peace one of our highest priorities. Some reasons include:

- **Time is not on Israel's side.** As stressed by Oz v'Shalom, if there is not a two-state solution relatively soon, Israel will face a situation where Arabs are a majority of the population of Israel and the West Bank. Israel would then face the unfortunate choice of either giving the West Bank Arabs voting rights — which would mean the end of Israel as a Jewish state — or not doing so and being looked on by much of the world as an apartheid state. Neither of these choices would be good for Israel. On December 10, 2010, In a major talk at the Brookings Institution's Saban Center Seventh Annual Forum on prospects for progress toward peace, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton pointed out that the ever evolving technology of war means that in the absence of a peace deal "long-term population trends... are endangering the Zionist vision of a Jewish and democratic state."
- **The unstable situation and the widespread hatred and violence in the Middle East could result in a wider war with devastating consequences for Israel and many other nations.** Another war in the area could be especially destructive for Israel, since Hamas and Hezbollah have been stockpiling far more missiles and other increasingly lethal

weapons. Furthermore, the record wildfire near Haifa in early December, 2010 should provide a warning of the potential grave dangers to Israel if her forest areas were set afire in a war by enemy missiles, especially at a time when these areas are currently so dry from lack of rain.

In January 2011, Colonel Dan Zusman, who is in charge of defending about 1.5 million Israelis in the Tel Aviv area, said on IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) radio that “missiles and rockets from all fronts will reach Tel Aviv in the next round... We are talking about dozens of missiles of different kinds that will hit Tel Aviv and, therefore, the estimate is that there will be hundreds of dead, destruction of buildings, and destruction of infrastructure.”

Unfortunately, every major Israeli city will be threatened in a future war, not only those on the northern and southern borders. This frightening picture was reinforced in an April 8, 2011 article in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, indicating that Wikileaks documents reveal that “Israel expects the next war against Hezbollah will last two months, during which 24,000 to 36,000 rockets and missiles are expected to be launched at Israel — about 6,000 of them aimed at Tel Aviv.”

- **Although there are many causes of antisemitism, one major source for Muslim antisemitism today is the ongoing Israeli/Palestinian-Arab conflicts** (see Chapter 4). When Palestinians daily experience or see on television other Palestinians being detained at security checkpoints and other examples of what they regard as humiliation, it builds resentment against all Israelis and Jews in general. There was a significant increase in antisemitism in Europe during and after the Israeli invasion of Gaza in January 2009. A just, comprehensive, sustainable settlement of the present disputes could be a major factor in reducing antisemitism. Also, when Muslims worldwide so often see pictures on their TV screens that emphasize the worse aspects of Israel’s occupation, it makes terrorism and future conflicts more likely, which will negatively affect not only Israel but Jews throughout the world. An end to the occupation would also mean an end to broadcasting these types of images.

- **Israel currently faces enormous economic and social problems.** There is a large and growing poverty gap. According to the anti-poverty and anti-hunger group Meir Panim, which operates 14 completely free restaurants throughout Israel and delivers meals daily to the elderly and homebound, one in four Israelis live in severe poverty and an estimated 850,000 children live below the poverty line, “barely receiving one warm meal a day.”

The educational and health care systems have suffered in recent years because so much of the Israeli budget necessarily goes for security. High school class sizes are increasing to as many as 40 students in some cases. As university budgets are slashed, many departments, especially in the humanities, have been closed. Hundreds of Israeli scholars have sought jobs in other countries because of decreases in funding for education and research, creating a serious “brain drain.” Israel’s health care system faces a major crisis as government subsidized health maintenance organizations and hospitals are unable to pay doctors adequate wages. For five months in 2011, Israeli doctors were on a partial strike, performing only emergency surgery.

- **Israel badly needs peace in order to address its many domestic problems.** A sixth of Israel’s budget goes to defense and this is steadily increasing as new weapon systems are introduced. Meanwhile, social services are constantly being reduced and the number of middle class Israelis has sharply decreased.

In July and August of 2011 there were major protest demonstrations in Tel Aviv and ten other Israeli cities, protesting the high costs of housing and food and low wages. An estimated 150,000 Israelis took to the streets of Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities on the evening of July 30; this is about two percent of Israel’s population, which would be the equivalent of about six million Americans, to give perspective on the size of the protests. Later demonstrations kept getting bigger, culminating with an estimated 450,000 Israelis demonstrating on September 3 in Tel Aviv and many other Israeli cities.

Started initially mainly by young Israelis, the protests have expanded to other groups of aggrieved Israelis, including struggling working parents, dairy farmers, and striking doctors. Even more significantly, leaders of the Histadrut, Israel's powerful organization of trade unions, are supporting the protests, putting Israeli labor behind them, and general strikes that occurred in support of the protesters. A late July 2011 *Ha'aretz* poll showed that 87 percent of Israelis sided with the protesters, and that Prime Minister Netanyahu's approval rating had plummeted from 51 to 32 percent. Israeli progressives hope that the protests signal a rebirth of the Israeli left which has been relatively dormant while the focus has been on security issues.

- **Benefits for Israel if peace is finally reached would include open borders, an end to boycotts, international cooperation, and free movement of persons, products, and services across borders — all of which would lead to major economic growth.** Peace would reduce the need for military expenditures in all the countries involved in the conflict. Billions of dollars would become available for economic development to improve the quality of life for everyone. Peace would open transportation connections, air travel, maritime relations, and better telecommunications. More outside investments would be attracted, leading to more jobs and greater prosperity.
- **The record wildfire in December 2010 discussed above illustrates Israel's need to devote more attention and money to domestic issues.** Israelis became aware of how woefully unprepared the country was to fight fires. Many requests over the years for more money and resources for firefighting have been turned down, largely because so much had to be allocated for security concerns. While politicians knew of the serious deficiencies of the firefighting service in Israel, a succession of government agencies and ministers had failed to deal with the situation because they were necessarily focused on Israel's security.

- **The world now faces an impending, unprecedented climate crisis and many other global threats.** Some scientists are saying that climate change could spin out of control with disastrous effects within a few years, unless drastic changes are soon made. If this crisis is not properly responded to, nothing else will matter. It is essential that the world focus its attention on saving the global environment, but this will be more difficult if there is continued instability and violence in the Middle East. Of course, this is also true of other world trouble spots.
- **Israel is especially threatened by climate change.** In 2010 she was experiencing the worst drought in her history, and has been experiencing severe heat waves, with unusually high temperatures even in the winter. With the Israeli Union for Environmental Defense projecting an average decrease in rainfall of 20 to 30 percent, severe storms, increased desertification, an inundation of the coastal plain where most Israelis live by a rising Mediterranean Sea, along with other negative effects from climate change, it is essential that Israel find peace so that she can devote greater attention to responding to climate change.
- **Israel faces many other environmental problems that are not being adequately addressed, largely because so much attention and resources are devoted to security concerns.** Far more people die from air pollution in Israel than from terrorism and traffic accidents combined. Most Israeli rivers are badly polluted. There is a shortage of open space. Less than 10 percent of Israel's garbage is recycled. The flow in the Jordan River is less than a tenth of its normal flow, and most of it near its entrance to the Dead Sea is sewage. Since the Jordan River is the main source of replenishment for the Dead Sea, the Dead Sea is rapidly shrinking, with resulting nearby sinkholes that threaten the tourist industry in the area. Once again, a resolution of Middle East conflicts would enable Israel to respond more effectively to these problems.

- **Because of the great stress on security issues, Israel's progressive forces have been considerably weakened.** When people are primarily concerned about terrorism and other security concerns, it is hard for a politician who is concerned about the environment, poverty, education, and other social issues to get a receptive hearing. In recent years the left-leaning Labor Party and the progressive Meretz party have seen the number of their Knesset seats sharply reduced. A party led by leading Israeli environmentalists Alon Tal and Eren Ben Yemini that stressed a greater emphasis on environmental and social issues received less than one percent of the vote in the 2008 Israeli national elections. Meanwhile, right-wing parties continue to grow stronger. In a recent column in the *Jerusalem Post*, Larry Derfner writes that when he tries to explain Israel to Americans, he asks them to imagine 80 percent of their fellow citizens being Republicans.
- **Threats to Israel's security rightly occupy Jews attention but they also divert attention from other issues of great importance.** When I try to engage some Jews on the need to apply Jewish values to the solution of current global threats, I have often been told, "All I care about is Israel." Many Jews supported President Bush's reelection in 2004 because they thought that he would be better for Israel, despite the fact that he had a dismal record on the environment, climate change, social security, taxes, job creation, and other issues, and that he had led the United States into a quagmire in Iraq by misrepresenting Iraq's alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction and involvement in the terror acts of 9/11. None of this mattered, as long as he was perceived as being "good for Israel," which meant having a hands-off policy. Jews have a special mission to be a "light unto the nations," but it is very difficult when so much attention and resources must be given to combating terrorism and to maintaining a strong military force.
- **Failure to achieve a settlement of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict damages Israel's image worldwide.** A poll

commissioned by the BBC in December and January 2011 asked over 28,000 people in 27 countries around the world: "Please tell me if you think each of the following countries is having a mainly positive or mainly negative influence in the world." For Israel, the results were 21% positive and 49% negative. Of the 27 countries involved in the survey, 22 saw Israel in a negative light. Of course, much of this is due to misleading and false reports, but a settlement of her conflicts would greatly improve Israel's image.

- **The continued conflict with the Palestinians is shifting Israeli opinion sharply to the right.** A survey reported in July 2010 showed a clear majority of Israeli young people supported the right wing. For youths 18-21 years of age, the right led the left by 57% to 13%, with the rest undecided or not responding. For people 21-24 years old, the right led the left by 66% to 10%. During the 12-year period of the survey, support for the right overall increased from 48% to 62%, while support for the left decreased from 32% to 12%. A major factor behind this shift is Israel's need to focus on security issues. A peaceful resolution of the current conflicts would result in more attention being given to educational, environmental, and other social issues and this would likely reduce narrow, conservative, hawkish views.
- **Israel's long struggle to maintain security is making her less tolerant of dissent.** One example of this is the hearings in the Knesset to determine if the U.S.-based organization, J Street, should be allowed to continue to call itself a pro-Israel group. Many groups, including the Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Committee, condemned the hearings, with some comparing it to the McCarthy witch-hunts in the United States. Naomi Chazan, president of the New Israel Fund and a former Knesset member stated:

Let us be clear about what is happening here. Proponents of a narrow, demagogic, ultra-nationalist, pro-settlement, anti-peace point of view have decided that every other point of view is



illegitimate. They believe that only they can define what it means to love and support Israel and what is best for its future. In so doing, they undermine Israel's standing as a liberal democracy, alienate its most stalwart supporters in the Jewish world, and sadly contribute to its de-legitimization in the international arena.

We at the New Israel Fund have been a direct target of these retrogressive assaults; we continue to do everything to safeguard Israel's diverse and democratic character. While we deplore the tendentious and unfounded attacks on J Street, we also believe that these will serve to shine a spotlight on the battle for democratic values here in Israel. With the help of millions of Israelis and lovers of Israel worldwide, the vision of a just Israel, at peace with itself and its neighbors, will ultimately be realized.

Rabbi Michael Melchior, Former Minister of Social and Diaspora Affairs and leader of the dovish religious party *Meimad*, stated:

A large portion of the Jewish world, mainly the non-orthodox, is drifting away from Israel and I find it very disturbing. We mustn't push them away but bring them closer to us. They are allowed to object to legislation and our views. J Street is within the family.

There have been several other examples of a shift in Israel toward curbing freedom of thought. One major example is the passage by the Knesset on July 11, 2011 of a law making it illegal for anyone to call for boycotts of Israel or West Bank settlements, a clear violation of freedom of speech that essentially outlaws organizations like Jewish Voice for Peace, which selectively boycotts companies that profit from the occupation, but not Israel in general.<sup>4</sup>

While supporters of the law claim that it protects Israel from efforts to delegitimize the country, it actually undermines that purpose by providing reinforcement to

critics of Israel's democratic standing and by alienating some of Israel's supporters. Knesset Legal Adviser Eyal Yinon stated that the law "damages the core tenet of freedom of expression in Israel." Among many American Jews and Israelis who condemned the law, the Anti-Defamation League National Director Abraham Foxman said that the law is a disservice to Israel's democratic nature by allowing the government to "legally stifle calls to action."

**If a resolution of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict can be found, it would serve as a model for other trouble spots in the world.** At a time when military conflicts are becoming increasingly destructive and when so many human needs are unmet, as nations spend large percentages of their wealth on weapons, it is essential that there be a reduction in wars and violence. If Israel and the Palestinians — two peoples who have been at war for decades — can make peace, it could demonstrate that peace is possible everywhere.

Over the years, many Israeli prime ministers who were initially hawkish have come to the conclusion that Israel must make painful territorial compromises in order to seek a peaceful resolution. They include Yitzhak Rabin, Ariel Sharon, and Ehud Olmert. In January 2006, Olmert said: "The choice is between allowing Jews to live in all parts of the land of Israel and living in a state with a Jewish majority [which] mandates giving up parts of the Land of Israel. We cannot continue to control parts of the territories where most of the Palestinians live."

Former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told the Likud Party in May 2003, "The idea that it is possible to keep 3.5 million Palestinians under occupation is bad for Israel, bad for the Palestinians, and bad for the Israeli economy."

## **Prospects For Middle East Peace**

Gershon Baskin is a long-time peace activist in Israel and founder and former Israeli CEO of the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information (IPCRI), a joint Israeli-Palestinian

public policy research think-tank on Middle East conflict issues. The group proposes policy options to Mideast and other decision makers about the peace process. Baskin is also an elected member of the leadership of the Green Movement political party and a columnist for the *Jerusalem Post*. In his July 5, 2010 *Jerusalem Post* article, "Encountering Peace: And We Shall Dwell in Peace," Baskin discussed key points on the potential for peace:

- The basics of an agreement are well understood for what is "the most researched conflict in the history of conflicts and there are more detailed plans on how to resolve even the minutest of details in this conflict than any other." Every possible issue in the conflict has been explored in depth by Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams.
- Until now, the peace process has been a failure, and time is running out, as current options may no longer be available in the near future.
- A majority of Israelis and Palestinians say that they want peace and are ready to make painful compromises, but they both also feel that there is no partner on the other side.
- Failure to make peace would be catastrophic for both Israel and the Palestinians since, "the survival of the Jewish people on our land, of the Zionist enterprise in its entirety is based on our ability to extricate ourselves from the occupation of the Palestinian people and to make peace on the basis of two states for two peoples."
- Since there is a lack of trust on both sides, based on a long history in which many agreements have been broken, there must be a reliable third party who will monitor implementation and verify that all aspects of all agreements are being fully implemented. The reliable third party must be able to act immediately with full transparency when there are breaches, "to call the parties to task, to demand explanations and to insist on implementation."

- It is essential that President Obama become actively and directly involved and that intense, direct negotiations mediated by a leading American mediator start immediately, to reach an agreement that both sides can live with and that leaders on both sides will support enthusiastically.
- Prime Minister Netanyahu must, in effect, look Israelis in the eye and describe to them the necessary conditions for a peace agreement, including that the Palestinian state will include about 96 percent of the West Bank, with the Palestinians given land inside Israel in exchange for the 4 percent that Israel will annex as part of the agreement, and that Jerusalem will be the capital of both countries. Because of mutually agreeable land swaps, about 80 percent of the settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem will remain in place as part of Israel.
- President Abbas must also look into the eyes of his people and tell them that they will not be able to return to their lost homes inside Israel, but that they have the potential to build a model state using the latest technologies, create the first successful, working democracy in the Arab world, and have the best school system in the region.

The impatience felt by many Israelis and others over the lack of progress toward peace was very well expressed in another article by Baskin in the December 7, 2010 *Jerusalem Post*, “Encountering Peace: The House is On Fire.” The article appeared shortly after the U.S. announced that it had given up on efforts to get Israel to halt building in the West Bank as a means to get negotiations started again. Baskin stated:

Netanyahu must be called to task — are you ready to grant Palestinians their independence or do you wish to continue to control them? There is no middle ground. We who work for peace had hoped that the US would help us reach an agreement, but it seems it will not be providing the friendly push to help make the difficult decisions. But the creation of a Palestinian state is a Zionist imperative, not an

American one. It is in Israel's interest to midwife its birth...

The implementation of the two-states-for-two-peoples solution must come from the inner belief that we are making a choice not to be enemies of the Palestinian people. The more painless the birth of the Palestinian state, the more likely that we can move on to a process of real reconciliation and create the stability and security that both peoples require...

In peace we will have our state on 78% of the land between the river and the sea, and the Palestinians will accept the principle of some minor swaps that will allow some 75% of the settlers to remain in their homes, but the rest will have to come back to Israel or move into the annexed areas. The price of our freedom is the freedom of the Palestinians. Either we accept it now, while we have the overwhelming support of the West, or we will accept it later after we lose most of our supporters and most of our legitimacy.<sup>5</sup>

Some other considerations about a possible resolution of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict include:

- An "Israeli Peace Initiative" in May 2011, promoted by prominent Israeli academics, business leaders, two former Shin Bet chiefs, one former Mossad Chief, and a former Chief of Staff called on Israel to support a settlement based on the 1967 borders with mutually agreed upon territorial swaps that would enable most Israeli citizens to remain in Israel.
- Twelve of the 18 living former top officials of the Israel Defense Forces, Mossad, and Shin Bet security agencies have urged Prime Minister Netanyahu to resume efforts to reach a two-state solution with the Palestinians.
- Several polls have shown that most Israelis and American Jews favor a two-state solution.
- In July 2011, seven distinguished Israeli military, security,

and diplomatic experts toured the U.S. and met with members of President Obama's administration and Congress and Pentagon officials, to urge that Israeli/Palestinian negotiations toward a two-state solution soon begin. The delegation, which included Israeli Maj. Gen. (ret.) Shlomo Gazit, former Ambassador Alon Pinkas and Brig. Gen. (ret.) Nehemiah Dagan, argued that President Obama's support for a negotiated settlement based on 1967 lines with agreed-upon land swaps was defensible, and was a political and military imperative for Israel.

- On the evening of June 4, 2011, an estimated 20,000 Israelis marched through the streets of Central Tel Aviv under the banner "Israel says yes to a Palestinian state." Organizers argued that the establishment of a Palestinian state would serve vital Israeli interests.
- The terrorist group Hamas, whose charter favors the elimination of Israel, has stated several times that it would abide by a negotiated settlement obtained by the Palestinian Authority if it was also supported in a referendum of Palestinians.<sup>6</sup> Of course, no matter what promises are given, steps to insure Israeli security must be taken.

In conclusion, there is an important choice that Israel and its supporters must now face between: (1) an Israel that continues to make half-hearted peace offers which have no chance of being accepted, in which case conflicts and current socio-economic problems will continue and worsen, or (2) an Israel that recognizes that the alternative to such a bleak and depressing future is to make seeking peace her highest priority.

The achievement of peace between Israel and the Arab states will not be easy, but working toward it puts into practice essential Jewish values and mandates: to seek and pursue peace, to turn enemies into friends, and to work cooperatively for justice and the preservation of God's world. Fortunately, there are signs of movement among some Palestinians who have recognized that terrorism is counterproductive to their cause and have started to build the infrastructure and economic and

security conditions that can form the basis of a future Palestinian state.

Among the many blessings a just Mideast peace would bring is that it would enable Israel to strive to fulfill completely her true moral mission as a model of justice, compassion, and, most important, *shalom*. Then we would truly fulfill the vision of Isaiah: “It shall come to pass in the latter day... that out of Zion shall go forth Torah, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” (Isaiah 2: 2-3)

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### Notes for Chapter 6

<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, Continuum, London New York, revised edition 2003, p. 189, 190

<sup>2</sup> *Maariv*, Rosh Hashanah, 1975, quoted by David Bedein, “Genesis of an Israeli Religious Left,” *New Outlook*, January 1976, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Oz V’Shalom poster.

<sup>4</sup> We should also note that Peace Now has recently called for similar boycotts of the West Bank settlements. Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) is an American-based org that has over 90,000 supporters as of this writing, and maintains a blog called [Muzzlewatch](#) that tracks attempts on the part of the mainstream Jewish community to stifle dissent about Israeli policies. In 2011, the Anti-Defamation League targeted JVP as one of their Top 10 “anti-Israel” groups in an attempt to silence their dissent. However, JVP maintains that they are not anti-Israel, only anti-occupation. While we support efforts by JVP to end the occupation and peacefully resolve the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, we do not agree with all of their statements and activities. But like them, we do oppose BDS (boycott, divestment, and sanctions) when targeted at Israel in general, rather than at specific companies.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Article.aspx?id=198326>

<sup>6</sup> Hamas vows to honor Palestinian referendum on peace with Israel,” *Haaretz*, December 1, 2010, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/hamas-vows-to-honor-palestinian-referendum-on-peace-with-israel-1.328234>

## *The Souls of a Million Children*



A protest art “installment” by DanChurchAid at the Roskilde Festival, Denmark 2004. People were encouraged to sign the wall as a protest against the building of a wall between Israel and Palestine by the Israeli government. However, the message can also be seen as directed at both sides of this conflict. Not only physical walls, but also walls of misunderstanding, distrust, and suspicion prevent the peace process from moving forward. While the wall may prevent acts of terrorism in the short run, it is essential that there be a just, comprehensive, and sustainable resolution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict to reduce terrorism in the long run.



## Chapter 7

### How should we respond to bias and hatred toward Muslims?

*Whoever saves the life of another, surely he saves the lives of all humanity. — Qur'an, Surah al-ma'aidah 32*

*Whoever saves a single human life is considered as having saved an entire world.*

— *Talmud Yerushalmi, Sanhedrin 4:9*

*Christian, Jew, Muslim, shaman, Zoroastrian, stone, ground, mountain, river, each has a secret way of being with the Mystery [God], unique and not to be judged.*

—Jalal ad-Din Rumi, 13th-century Muslim mystic

When I started working on this book ten years ago, if someone had suggested that I would need to include a chapter on prejudice toward Muslims, I would have thought that he or she was crazy. The term “Islamophobia” didn’t even exist back then. But a decade after 9/11, it is now an important issue to confront.<sup>1</sup>

I want to make it clear at the start that I, of course, condemn all acts of terrorism, no matter who carries them out (including any acts of terror by extremist Americans and Israelis), no matter the supposed rationale. This certainly includes the horrendous crimes by Muslim terrorists committed

on September 11, 2001. I recognize that some Muslims have committed terrible acts, as have some people of other groups and religions, and I deplore discrimination and degradation in some Muslim countries directed toward Jews, women, homosexuals, freethinkers, “heretics,” Christians, and minority Muslim sects. However, it is also important to recognize the positive religious and ethical values within Islam, the contributions that many Muslims have made and are making to American society and the world, and the need to find common ground and solutions — lest extremists gain more credibility and support. The world cannot afford a “clash of civilizations,” involving over a billion Muslims, nor can it afford the erosion of civil liberties and damage to the social fabric which would result from treating every Muslim as a potential terrorist.

### **Why antagonism toward Muslims *must* be addressed**

Why is this a critical concern now? Because in many ways it crystallizes the choice we have today between a future world based on hatred, bigotry, intolerance, militarism, and selfishness — or one based on understanding, compassion, tolerance, kindness, and the seeking of common ground and cooperation. Many politicians and media commentators try to exploit fear and hatred in order to advance their careers and their agendas (which too frequently succeeds), especially after 9/11 and other terrorist attacks. Demonizing Muslims and propagating a message that Islam is dangerously spreading also shifts the public’s attention away from important issues, including economic difficulties, climate change, disease, mass species extinction, world hunger, lack of clean water, deforestation, poisoning and depletion of fish stocks in the world’s oceans, human population increases, and other current threats to humanity.

So, it is necessary to understand these issues and consider how to overcome the widespread ignorance, insensitivity, hatred, and bigotry, in order to pursue a better world, especially at a time when the world’s attention should be on responding to the many current threats. To combat conservative politicians who are using fear and bigotry to gain power, we need progressive, forward thinking leaders.

When considering American society and demagogues’

attempts to blame and marginalize Muslims, it is instructive to recall that the verse that recurs most often in the Hebrew Scriptures is a variation of “Be kind to the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” An intolerant world is not conducive to Jewish well being.

The need for this chapter was even more apparent after learning about the killing spree in Norway by Anders Behring Breivik on July 22, 2011. The confessed terrorist was greatly influenced by people who had warned for years about “Islamic threats.” His 1500-page manifesto was filled with quotations from them. This document, which was posted on the Internet, showed his great interest in debates in the United States about Islam and efforts to prevent Muslims from building mosques. These distorted views of Islam led him to murder 70 innocent teenagers at a Norwegian summer camp, in the mistaken belief that their liberal views were enabling radical Islamists to take over the world.

Disturbed by what hatred, bigotry, and the extensive demonization of Muslims can lead to, I became even more determined to investigate the realities, dispel the myths, and seek common ground that could increase tolerance, understanding, and harmony.

In an article in the July 29, 2011 *Washington Post*, “Norwegian attacks stem from a new ideological hate,” Abraham H. Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, condemned the increasing hatred of Muslims in the United States and Europe that contributed to the terrorism in Norway. He concluded:

In America, the polarization, vitriol and fear engendered by anti-Islamic activists must be replaced by reasoned and civil debate. We must rally the voices of reason to overcome the voices of intolerance before it is too late.

## **Historical examples of discrimination against religious groups**

Discrimination against religious groups is not a new phenomenon. Demagogues have always used prejudice to whip up the masses. Pharaoh used an argument about Jews that was similar to what we hear about Muslims today: they are getting too numerous and might join with our enemies (Exodus 1:9-10). Abraham Lincoln's opponents told poor Southern Baptist whites that he was a Catholic. John F. Kennedy was a Catholic, so his opponents evoked the fear that the Pope would soon rule over America. Some of FDR's enemies said he was Jewish and called him "Jewsevelt." Nazi propaganda referred to him as "*der Jude Rosenfeld*." Now an amazing number of suggestible Americans believe that President Obama is a Muslim and/or that he was not born in the United States — despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

Jews, of all people, should be aware of the dangers of scapegoating an entire ethnic or religious group for society's ills. After all, Hitler rose to power by blaming the Jews for Germany's problems during the Great Depression. But apparently many of us have not learned from that experience.

Santayana's famous statement that "those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it" takes on a very ominous meaning in this context. In the 1600s, Peter Stuyvesant, founder of New Amsterdam (later to become New York City), tried to expel the first Jews who arrived in Manhattan. But the Dutch West India Company said that Jews could stay. So Stuyvesant relented, but forbade the Jews to build a synagogue building anywhere in Manhattan. The first Jewish synagogue in New York was not permitted until 1730.

Contrast this with Benjamin Franklin who, although not a Jew (he was a Quaker), donated his own money toward building Mikveh Israel, the first synagogue in Philadelphia, in 1788. Or consider George Washington, who wrote in a letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, on August 17, 1790, "May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants — while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid."

## **Controversy over the proposed Muslim community center near “Ground Zero”**

Discussions of whether or not a Muslim community center, including a mosque, should be built two blocks from “Ground Zero,” the site of the former World Trade Center destroyed by Muslim fanatics on September 11, 2001, dominated the news for some time right before the 2010 mid-term election, overwhelming far more important issues. The intensity of this controversy has died down, but it is still representative of conflicts that will continue for years to come between anti-Muslim bigots and those trying to expand the mosaic of loyal discourse. The center had a small-scale opening with an exhibit of photographs on September 21, 2011, but it is still years and millions of dollars away from completion.

Of course the sensitivities of those who lost loved ones on 9/11 must be taken into account in any planning for the area. But those survivors have a wide range of views on the “mosque,” and they, like everyone else, have been subjected to massive misinformation and distortions that are spreading nationwide. There have also been strong oppositions recently to other mosques proposed in locations far from Ground Zero. So clearly, this controversy is not a one-time event but rather, a growing tendency toward intolerance.

Many people opposed the Muslim Center project because they believe that all Muslims are evil or potentially evil, constantly plotting terrorism and other negative things. Republican and Tea Party politicians, including Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich, and conservative commentators such as Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, and Glenn Beck, as well as much of the coverage on *Fox News*, reinforce these views as a way to increase their power, build their audience, reinforce their prejudices, and advance their ambitions.

Recent polls show that many Americans believe these Conservatives’ propaganda, and are questioning whether there is a place in America for their Muslim neighbors.

Some factors that opponents of the proposed center should consider include:

- It was fanatics, most of them Saudis, not typical Muslims and certainly not American Muslims, who destroyed the World Trade Center.
- Hostility toward all Muslims is exactly what the terrorists want. The Taliban are now using the Ground Zero controversy to recruit more followers.
- Muslims also died at the Trade Center and their families still mourn for them.
- Muslims were among the first responders on 9/11.
- In addition to a mosque, the proposed Center would have a memorial to the victims of 9/11, a swimming pool, a library, a 500-seat auditorium, meeting rooms, classrooms, a cafeteria, and other facilities available to both Muslims and non-Muslims.
- Muslims have lived peacefully in the United States since the mid-1800s, playing constructive roles, and contributing to the multilayered fabric of American life.
- There are also Christians and Jews involved in the planning for the proposed center, including Rabbi Joy Levitt of the Manhattan JCC, who is an unofficial advisor for the project. The proposed project is modeled after the 92nd Street Y in Manhattan, which is a Jewish institution but one used by people of many religions and communities, including Muslims. A major goal of the future center is to promote interfaith understanding and tolerance.

In some ways it would be better if the proposed Muslim Center were built further from Ground Zero, which might avoid much of the controversy and hurt. But with better tolerance and open-mindedness on the part of the American public, the proposed Muslim community center could have produced greater harmony, understanding, and healing. Instead, it was turned into an opportunity for divisiveness, largely by political

opportunists and conservative commentators.

Some critics have inaccurately called the mosque a triumphalist edifice and a victory monument for terrorism. Some have complained that it would “tower over” Ground Zero. But anyone who has been to lower Manhattan knows that a building more than two blocks away, even if it is 13 stories high, is not going to tower over anything. It won’t even be visible from Ground Zero.

Some people have called for “peaceful Muslims” to condemn the project. Apparently they are unaware that the Muslims involved in this project *are* peaceful. Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, the cleric behind initial plans to build the center, has been sent to the Middle East as a representative of both the George W. Bush administration and the Obama administration to discuss religious freedom in the United States, including, ironically, at the same time when most protests against the proposed center were taking place.

In fact, the initial name of the proposed center, Cordoba House, was chosen to evoke the interfaith tolerance that once existed among Christians, Jews and Muslims in Cordoba, Spain during the 8th-12th centuries — a historical reference that was apparently lost on most Americans. Maimonides, who was court physician to the Sultan of Turkey and one of the greatest scholars in Jewish history, was born in Cordoba. There is even a famous statue honoring him there. But opponents of the project have wrongly claimed the name is a reference to the Muslim conquest of Christian Spain and a call to “Islamicize” America — an accusation disturbingly similar to the Inquisition’s fear that secret Jews were “Judaizing” Christianity. Because of this misguided opposition, the project’s name was changed to the rather meaningless “Park51,” based on the address of the site.

## **Support for the construction of the Muslim Center**

Some people have recognized the great potential of the center, and the damage that will be done if the constitutional right of Muslims to build it is thwarted. For example, in an event on August 3, 2010, at which clergy members of several religions (including Judaism) gathered to support the project, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg said:

Let us not forget that Muslims were among those murdered on 9/11, and that our Muslim neighbors grieved with us as New Yorkers and as Americans. We would betray our values and play into our enemies' hands if we were to treat Muslims differently than anyone else. In fact, to cave to popular sentiment would be to hand a victory to the terrorists, and we should not stand for that.

Fareed Zakaria, author, CNN host and former international editor of *Newsweek*, returned his Anti-Defamation League's Hubert H. Humphrey First Amendment Freedoms Prize (which included a plaque and a \$10,000 honorarium) that he had received in 2005, as an act of support for the proposed center. He stated that he could not in good conscience keep it or the honorarium anymore, because the ADL opposed the construction of the Muslim Center. In an August 2010 *Newsweek* article explaining his actions, Zakaria said:

The lasting solution to the problem of Islamic terror is to prevail in the battle of ideas and to discredit radical Islam, the ideology that motivates young men to kill and be killed. Victory in the war on terror will be won when a moderate, mainstream version of Islam — one that is compatible with modernity — fully triumphs over the worldview of Osama bin Laden... If there is going to be a reformist movement in Islam, it is going to emerge from places like the proposed institute. We should be encouraging groups like the one behind this project, not demonizing them.

The ADL and other opponents of the construction of the community center claimed that their main motivation is not anti-Muslim prejudice, but rather sensitivity to the feelings of relatives of the nearly 3,000 people killed on 9/11. Zakaria rejected this reasoning in his *Newsweek* article, questioning whether the organization believed “that bigotry is OK if people think they're victims.”

With anti-Muslim feelings growing, it would be well to consider the words of President Bush, shortly after 9/11:



The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace. These terrorists don't represent peace. They represent evil and war.

When we think of Islam we think of a faith that brings comfort to a billion people around the world. Billions of people find comfort and solace and peace. And that's made brothers and sisters out of every race. America counts millions of Muslims amongst our citizens, and Muslims make an incredibly valuable contribution to our country. Muslims are doctors, lawyers, and law professors, members of the military, entrepreneurs, shopkeepers, moms, and dads. And they need to be treated with respect. In our anger and emotion, our fellow Americans must treat each other with respect.

Although most Republicans and other conservatives were strong supporters of our 43rd president, somehow these words do not seem to have much influence on their views about Muslim Americans. President Obama was following in George Bush's footsteps (as well as George Washington's as cited earlier) when he, too, affirmed the principle of religious freedom by stating that Muslims have the right to build their community center where they want — for which, sadly, he was strongly criticized.

### **Jewish support for the construction of the Muslim Center**

So how should Jews react to situations like the Muslim Center controversy? Such events provide golden opportunities to work together with our Muslim neighbors and to combat prejudice. This, in turn, might help create closer relations between some Jews and Muslims.

Fortunately, some Jewish groups have responded very positively in support of the construction of the Muslim Center. Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf thanked American Jewish supporters in August 2010:

I express my heartfelt appreciation for the gestures of goodwill and support from our Jewish friends and colleagues. Your support is a reflection of the great history of mutual cooperation and understanding that Jewish and Muslim civilizations have shared in the past, and remains a testament to the enduring success of our continuing dialogue and dedication to upholding religious freedom, tolerance, and cooperation among us all as Americans.

The imam was referring to, among other examples, the demonstrations supporting the Islamic center by Rabbi Arthur Waskow, director of the Shalom Center, and by the progressive group J Street, which presented over 10,000 signatures backing the center. Rabbi Waskow stated that the center would enable people to learn about Islam and recognize that much of what people believe about that religion is a myth. J Street spokesman Isaac Luria stated at a J Street demonstration in August 2010 in support of the Muslim Center:

As American Jews, as minorities here in this country, we know — from our experience elsewhere — that standing up for minority rights is incredibly important. If anybody in this country is threatened, if his or her rights are taken away, that means all of us are at risk. So we're here standing up strong for religious freedom.

We believe that this Islamic cultural center is an important addition to the city. What they are doing is absolutely within their right. It's going to be modeled after the 92nd Street Y here in our city, a cultural institution.

This is a critical moment for the American Jewish community. Will we line up with religious freedom? Or will we side with bigotry and Islamophobia?

Daisy Khan, executive director of the American Society for Muslim Advancement and one of the initiators of the effort to construct the Muslim Center, and the wife of Imam Rauf, told a Rabbis for Human Rights conference that I attended in New York on December 7, 2010 that many Jews offered practical

and morale-boosting advice and “We could not have done this without your support.”<sup>2</sup>

Speaking at the same panel, Rabbi Joy Levitt, director of the Jewish Community Center in Manhattan and an informal advisor for the Muslim Center for the past six years, complimented groups like Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR), but lamented that too few Jews spoke up in support of the controversial center. “This was not our finest moment,” Rabbi Levitt said, adding that she heard comments of “fear, ignorance, xenophobia” from Jewish community members after reports about her support for the Muslim Center were publicized. “There were not enough [supportive] voices coming from the mainstream Jewish community,” the rabbi added. “Very few mainstream rabbis,” outside of those affiliated with organizations like RHR, “were able to find their voices. We weren’t vocal enough.”

## **Recent examples of discrimination against Muslims**

The argument that it’s only the location of the Center that is being objected to, and not the center itself, is belied by the recent increase in anti-Muslim feeling and public actions throughout the United States. This includes opposition to the construction of mosques in Brooklyn and Staten Island and in several states that are hundreds, and in some cases thousands, of miles from Ground Zero, including California, Wisconsin, and Tennessee.

Opponents of mosques have sometimes been hostile and aggressive. In some cases, they have brought dogs to intimidate Muslims while they were holding prayer services — an insult as serious as bringing a pig into a synagogue. Some opponents spray-painted “Not Welcome” on a construction sign announcing construction of a mosque in Tennessee, and later tore the sign apart. A fire was also set at that mosque.

One example of fear mongering and Muslim-bashing occurred in the midterm 2010 election in Oklahoma. After a major scare campaign, 70 percent of voters in Oklahoma approved a state Constitutional amendment making it illegal for a state judge to base any court decision on Islamic religious law (*sharia*) or to consider any form of international law. This was

a completely manufactured problem, since the issue has never come up in the state's courts.

Anti-Islam activists and some cynical politicians apparently persuaded some voters that Islamic law was a threat in Oklahoma. However, *sharia* is no more a threat to the U.S. court systems than is Jewish *halachic* law or Catholic canon law. Nevertheless, a major part of the political campaign was based on Islam-bashing. Muslim leaders in Oklahoma reported getting increased levels of hate mail. Because the campaign succeeded in increasing the turnout of conservatives, Republican politicians in other states are considering similar resolutions.

In an August 10, 2011 op-ed article for the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (JTA), Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, called efforts by American politicians, including some Republican presidential candidates, to claim that *sharia* might infiltrate into the American court system “one of the more pernicious conspiracy theories to gain traction in our country in recent years.” He stated:

But the anti-*sharia* bills are more than a matter of unnecessary public policy. These measures are, at their core, predicated on prejudice and ignorance. They constitute a form of camouflaged bigotry that enables their proponents to advance an idea that finds fault with the Muslim faith and paints all Muslim Americans as foreigners and anti-American crusaders.

If the hysteria over *sharia* law continues to percolate through our political and social discourse, there is bound to be unintended consequences.

### **Potential effects of anti-*sharia* Laws on *halachah***

Efforts by conservative lawmakers across the United States to outlaw *sharia* law have Jewish organizations concerned that *halachah* (Jewish laws and legal authority) could be next. “The laws are not identical, but as a general rule bans on *sharia* could be interpreted broadly to prevent two Jewish litigants from going to a *beit din* (Jewish court),” said Abba Cohen, the Washington director of the Orthodox organization Agudath Israel of America. “That would be a terrible

infringement on our religious freedom.” He added that laws protecting religious behavior in the workplace – such as the wearing of head coverings or the right to take certain holy days off — could also be affected.

These threats led Agudath Israel and the Orthodox Union to sign on to an American Jewish Committee-initiated letter to state legislatures in the spring of 2011, urging them to reject anti-*sharia* laws. Other groups supporting the AJC letter include the American Civil Liberties Union, the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, and Americans United for Separation of Church and State, an indication of the widespread opposition to the legislation targeting Islamic law. Several Jewish groups, including the Orthodox Union, Agudath Israel, and the Union for Reform Judaism, are also urging their constituent synagogues to oppose anti-*sharia* laws in states where they are being considered.

## **Disinformation campaigns against Muslims**

There is widespread disinformation against Muslims and Islam, and people generally do not bother to examine the truth of these accusations. I recently received an email from a friend stating that traffic at Madison Avenue and 42nd Street in Manhattan is stopped every Friday afternoon so that Muslims can gather and pray. Several photos of Muslims bowing down in prayer and covering an entire street accompanied and reinforced the message. I would certainly understand anger at Muslims if the report of alleged disruptions every Friday at one of the busiest locations in Manhattan were true.

However, I found it very hard to believe that such a thing was actually happening in my city without my ever having heard about it, and without any coverage on local media, not even on *Fox News* and other conservative media sources. So I did a quick Internet search. It turns out that this is not a weekly event, but that *once a year* the Muslim Foundation of America organizes a Muslim Day Parade that includes a gathering of Muslims for their noon prayer. The Muslim parade event has been held every year since 1985.

Criticizing the event is like attacking the St. Patrick’s Day Parade or the annual Salute to Israel Parade that blocks traffic on many New York City streets once a year. For that matter,

the same thing happens all across America on the Fourth of July and on other occasions.

Jews have also often been the victims of false information. For example, for many years, Jews have had to contend with antisemitic writers who claim to “unmask” the Talmud by making lists of every negative quote they can find, usually taken out of context and poorly translated. A person reading these lists without any prior knowledge of Judaism and Jewish religious practices would probably think it is the cruelest and most hateful religion on the planet.

Now the same thing is happening to Islam, with biased enemies of Islam collecting everything negative ever said by any Muslim anywhere, while including none of the positive teachings. These lists are deliberate distortions, which is why one should be suspicious of websites claiming to “unmask” Islam. We should keep in mind Mark Twain’s statement a century before the Internet, “A lie can travel halfway around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.”

## **Negative profiling and harassment of Muslims**

There have been many recent examples of Muslims being singled out for suspicion and mistreatment. One example occurred on May 6, 2011 when two imams dressed in Muslim attire were removed just before takeoff from an Atlantic Southeast Airlines flight because some passengers felt uncomfortable with the pair being on the flight. And this occurred even though the imams had both successfully passed through security and even secondary security checks. Ironically, the two imams were traveling to attend a conference about prejudice against Muslims.

Many American’s ideas about Muslims are based on misconceptions and misunderstandings. A report<sup>3</sup> by the highly respected “Population Reference Bureau” points out that “concerns about the rapid growth of Muslims in many countries are based on popular perceptions, not statistical evidence.” Contrary to the common wisdom, the PRB indicates that the Muslim population in most European countries is less than five percent and that fertility rates for Muslim women have been decreasing. According to the 2010 report of the European Union’s *Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, cases of

terrorism have been sharply decreasing in recent years and in 2009, Muslims were responsible for only one of 294 terrorist attempts in the six European countries that they surveyed.<sup>4</sup>

Of course there are evil and extremist forces among Muslims, including the Taliban and Al Qaeda, as there are in every religion, and we must be vigilant in guarding against terroristic acts. And there have been many examples of the mistreatment of Jews and other minorities in Muslim countries. While evil and terrorism will never be completely eradicated from the world until the Messiah comes, I believe that, as discussed in the next chapter, a U.S.-led global Marshall plan to significantly reduce poverty, hunger, illiteracy, disease, pollution, and other societal ills, has the potential to reduce instability, violence, and terrorism in the here and now.

Several polls have found that people who have actually met and spoken with average Muslims are far less prejudiced against them than those who have not. When you sit down with members of another religion and listen to what they really believe, you often find it is not what you thought. Mainstream Islam forbids suicide and the killing of innocent people. A “jihad” that targets innocent people is, by definition, not a real jihad.<sup>5</sup> Most Muslims stress that suicide bombings and other terrorist acts are a wicked perversion of their religion. However, as documented by the Southern Poverty Law Center, many anti-Muslim groups were started as a reaction to 9/11.

A number of factors seem to be ominously converging to lead to the scapegoating of American Muslims. First, there was the attack on September 11, 2001, carried out by Saudi fanatics, but widely perceived as representative of all Muslims everywhere. Then there are the unwinnable and seemingly unendable wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which are Muslim countries, as well as continued terrorist attacks around the world, many by Muslim extremists. Plus we have a shaky economy that feels like a depression in many areas, with high unemployment and underemployment, a very high deficit, and foreclosures on homes — all of which leaves many people feeling that the U.S. society has gone profoundly astray, with conditions heading in a negative direction. Add these factors together, and people are looking for someone to blame.

## **Positive relations between Muslims and others**

There are numerous positive developments and indicators of cooperation in the Muslim world. For example, many people know that some Muslim extremists have terrorized Christians in the Middle East. One example is the terrorist bombing of a Christian Coptic Church in Egypt on January 1, 2011, that killed 21 people and injured 79 others. But relatively few know that five days later, on the Coptic New Year, thousands of Muslim Egyptians formed “human shields” to defend Coptic Christians from terrorism as they attended midnight Masses throughout the country. The Muslim protectors organized under the slogan, “We either live together, or we die together.”

There were further examples of Christian/Muslim cooperation during the protests against former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in the winter of 2010-11. At one point, when Muslim Brotherhood members started chanting their group’s slogan — “Islam is the Solution” — Egyptian youth drowned them out by chanting: “Christians and Muslims, we are all Egyptians.” On another occasion, Christians formed a human chain surrounding Muslim protesters in Tahrir Square, so that the Muslims could perform their Friday prayers without being attacked by Mubarak supporters. Christians and Muslims also joined together to form neighborhood community watch groups to provide protection.

Certainly far more must be done to improve relations between Muslims and others in several Middle Eastern countries, but this was a start. Hopefully these examples of cooperation will soon become the norm.

### **Contributions of American Muslims toward combating domestic terrorism**

Another factor to consider is that American Muslims have been an important factor in combating domestic terrorism, and antagonism toward Muslims discourages their cooperation. Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN), one of two Muslims in the United States Congress, said at a Center for American Progress-sponsored event that, according to the Muslim Public Affairs Council, “About a third of all foiled al-Qaeda-related plots in the U.S. relied on support or information provided by members of the Muslim community.”<sup>6</sup>



Indeed, the police were initially alerted to the smoking automobile in the failed Times Square bombing plot in May 2010 by a Senegalese Muslim immigrant who works nearby. And Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab's father alerted U.S. authorities to his son's very radical views months before his son's failed effort to blow up a plane over Detroit in 2009.

Long before he initiated the NY Muslim cultural center project, Imam Feisal Abdul Raul worked closely with the U.S. State Department to foster a positive image of the U.S. in several Muslim countries. The FBI has honored Imam Yahya Hend in January 2009 for improving collaboration between the Muslim community and law enforcement. Imam Khalid Latif is a uniformed member of the New York Police Department. There are many additional examples of Muslims assisting our security and improving conditions in the United States and elsewhere.

An August 2010 study found that American mosques are helping deter the spread of extremism and terrorism. According to the *New York Times*, the study found that "many mosque leaders had put significant effort into countering extremism by building youth programs, sponsoring antiviolence forums, and scrutinizing teachers and texts."<sup>7</sup> The study's co-author, David Kurzman, stated that "Muslim-American communities have been active in preventing radicalization: This is one reason that Muslim-American terrorism has resulted in fewer than three dozen of the 136,000 murders committed in the United States since 9/11." A leading Muslim organization, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, has unequivocally condemned terrorism and has initiated many anti-extremist campaigns.

### **Congressman Peter King's anti-Muslim bias**

Unfortunately, these positive stories go unnoticed by anti-Muslim propagandists. Peter King, Chairman of the House Committee on Homeland Security, held hearings on March 7, 2011 to investigate what he calls "the radicalization of the American Muslim community." He claims that 80 percent of U.S. mosques are "controlled by radical imams" and adds that "there are too many mosques in this country."

Congressman King shows no interest in investigating other potential terrorist sources in the United States, even after

the horrible shootings of Jewish Rep. Gabby Giffords and 19 others in Arizona on January 8, 2011. He ignores the rise of much hateful rhetoric in the U.S., such as claims that President Obama is a socialist, a Muslim, and not a native-born American, as well as many recorded cases of neo-Nazi, white supremacist, and extremist anti-abortion domestic terrorism, including Oklahoma City bombings and the murder of innocent obstetricians who performed legal and necessary medical procedures. Instead, he seems determined to single out Muslims for investigation and harassment.

In September 2011, Rep. King was called before a committee of the British parliament and questioned about his unconditional support in the 1970s and 1980s for the IRA and other Irish terrorists who murdered dozens of innocent British civilians. King was utterly unrepentant and defended those terrorists who were of *his* ethnicity and community, while continuing to smear American Muslims and mosques as dedicated to terrorism.

In response to the King hearings, at the suggestion of the Shalom Center, on Tuesday, February 22, 2011 — George Washington's Birthday — a Pray-In by faith leaders and laity of the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian traditions was held outside Rep. King's Long Island office. Their purpose, the planners stated "is to show solidarity with our Muslim brothers and sisters, to stand shoulder to shoulder in the belief that our country is founded on religious tolerance." They felt that they were honoring President Washington on his birthday by implementing the words in his letter to the Jews of Rhode Island. Washington also wrote in that letter "To bigotry, no sanction; to persecution, no assistance."

Rabbis for Human Rights-North America organized a group of American Rabbis who made videotaped statements opposing Congressman King's hearing. (They can be seen by visiting <http://www.rhrna.org/?p=1648>.)

At a Times Square demonstration protesting Congressman King's hearing, at which many in the audience held up placards declaring "Today I am a Muslim too," Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, a group that has been active in promoting better relations between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, stated, "To single out Muslim Americans as the source of homegrown terrorism and not

examine all forms of violence motivated by extremist belief — that, my friends, is an injustice.”

Perhaps the horrible terrorist act by an anti-Muslim fanatic in Oslo, Norway on July 22, 2011, that killed at least 76 innocent people, will help make Congressman King recognize what anti-Muslim hysteria can lead to and that there are other security threats that we should consider.

### **Is hatred of Muslims hurting U.S. strategic interests?**

Opponents of the proposed Muslim Center and other Muslim projects are potentially harming U.S. security and endangering American troops by making it more difficult to “win the hearts and minds” of Muslims in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other Muslim countries where U.S. forces are deployed. They are also potentially increasing the chances for terrorism by confirming the message of Muslim extremists that the U.S. is at war with Islam. In addition, they are undermining the messages of religious tolerance and cultural pluralism upon which the United States was founded, and that we have been trying to propagate in the world.

How can we convince other countries to grant religious freedom to Christians, Jews, Baha’is, and other minorities if we are not doing it ourselves? It is indeed ironic that some of the strongest voices calling for a more “patriotic” America are actually working to undermine the First Amendment and our cherished American liberties.

The Taliban have already seized onto the “Ground Zero mosque” controversy as a tool for recruitment — to the point that they are hoping that this Manhattan Muslim cultural center *won’t* be built, because that would provide better propaganda for their cause. In August 2010, Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told *Newsweek*:

By preventing this mosque from being built, America is doing us a big favor. It’s providing us with more recruits, donations, and popular support... We talk about how America tortures with water boarding, about the cruel confinement of Muslims in wire cages in Guantanamo, about the killing of innocent women and children in air attacks—and now America gives us

another gift with its street protests to prevent a mosque from being built in New York... The more mosques you stop, the more jihads we will get.

Brian Fishman, a research fellow at the Combating Terrorism Center at the United States Military Academy at West Point and also at the New American Foundation in Washington, said, “When you’ve got folks who are looking for the worst in Islam and are promoting that as the entire religion of 1.5 or 1.6 billion people, then you only empower the real extremists.”

In Gainesville, Florida, Christian minister Terry Jones, leader of a tiny congregation of about 30 people, threatened to hold a “Burn a Qur’an Day” on September 11, 2010. This sparked worldwide protest from Muslims (including violent riots in some places) and non-Muslims alike. Once again, this echoes history, when book-burnings, disputations, and bans of holy works were directed at Jews.

Pastor Jones backed down and called off the event at the last minute, apparently in reaction to negative attention and protests. No Qur’ans were burned, but the damage had been done, increasing ill will toward America throughout the Muslim world. On September 12, Pastor Jones went to New York to meet with Imam Rauf about the proposed Muslim project. Then, implying that the imam had given him a private commitment that he would abandon the project, Jones did a complete u-turn and stated that he would never again threaten to burn a Qur’an, nor would he try to hurt any other religion.

Despite that statement, Pastor Jones reversed himself again, and did conduct a Qur’an burning in March 2011, after holding a “trial” of the Qur’an and finding it “guilty.” When this became known in early April, despite years of efforts to improve U.S. relations with Afghanistan, thousands of Afghans rioted, shouting anti-American slogans, overrunning a U.N. compound, and killing at least 20 people, including seven U.N. workers.

Rather than being repentant for the terrible results of his arrogant and grossly insensitive action (which top American government and military officials had personally pleaded him to forgo), Pastor Jones indicated that he next planned to hold a “trial” about the life of Mohammad.

## **Positive Muslim teachings**

As in the sacred writings of all religions, there are some destructive and troubling teachings in the Islamic scriptures, and people who want to speak negatively about Islam spread them widely. But there are far more Muslim teachings that reflect a broadminded religion of compassion and tolerance. A few examples:

- Oh, humanity! We (God) created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes that you may know each other. Truly, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the best in conduct.-Qur'an 49:13
- It may be that God will grant love (and friendship) between you and those whom you now hold as enemies, for Allah has power over all things. And Allah is Oft Forgiving and Merciful. (Qur'an 60:7)
- Allah loves those who are just. (Qur'an 60:8)
- Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel (evil) with what is better: then will he between you and whom there was hatred become as it were your friend and intimate. (Qur'an 41:34)

Of course, as with other religious people, Muslims do not always live up to the highest values of their religion. Nevertheless, the above quotes are a sample of positive teachings that Muslims strive for.

## **Muslim outreach for solidarity and dialogue**

Since at least 2007, some elements in the global Muslim community have reached out to non-Muslims, calling for solidarity and dialogue. On October 11, 2007, a 29-page letter entitled, "A Common Word Between Us and You," signed by 138 Muslim religious leaders and scholars worldwide, was sent to Christian leaders. Citing the Qur'an, Christian Scriptures, and

the Torah, the letter is an invitation to work together for harmony and peace. It represents an effort to show that moderate Muslims are willing to actively oppose violence and to demonstrate that Islam is a peaceful religion. The letter concludes: "Without peace and justice between our two communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world."

On February 25, 2008, the same Muslim scholars and clerics sent to the Jewish community, "A Call to Peace, Dialogue and Understanding Between Muslims and Jews." This clear attempt to establish mutual respect between our communities and to improve Jewish-Muslim relations stressed commonalities between Judaism and Islam and urged an end to dehumanizing prejudices and stereotypes.

It is to be hoped that such endeavors to establish reconciliation and open exchange will continue and expand.

### **Joint Jewish-Muslim efforts to counter prejudice**

Muslim and Jewish groups have been attempting to work together to combat bias and antagonisms that focus on prejudices against both groups. In the spring of 2011, the World Jewish Congress, the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, the Muslim Jewish Conference, the World Council of Muslims for Interfaith Relations, and the European Jewish Congress co-sponsored a month-long initiative to speak out against the rise of far-right extremist groups throughout Europe. They ran a series of educational events in May 2011, culminating in Brussels on May 30, when top Jewish and Muslim leaders presented a joint declaration to European Commission President José Manuel Barroso, stating:

We resolve to work together to counter efforts to demonize or marginalize either of our communities. Bigotry against any Jew or any Muslim is an attack on all Muslims and all Jews. We are united in our belief in the dignity of all peoples... We recognize that the issues of identity, integration, multiculturalism and immigration are complex ones that need to be addressed properly and in consultation with the minority communities in Europe. However, there must be no tolerance for the demonization of entire faith

communities.

Rabbi Marc Schneier, president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, an organization dedicated to promoting unity and understanding among ethnic groups, said in a talk to the World Jewish Congress in May 2011, “Our purpose is to make clear that Jews and Muslims will be there for each other if either is being unfairly attacked and will stand united in support of principles of democracy and pluralism that will ensure a decent future for all Europeans.”

Rabbi Shmuly Boteach wrote on this subject in his May 25, 2011 blog (while at the same time condemning Muslim extremists):

I am a Rabbi and a Jew who has forever fought Islamophobia and has repeatedly written and preached in front of tens of thousands of Jews and Christians that Islam is a great world religion that took Jews in when they were kicked out of Catholic Spain and Portugal. I am constantly inspired by everyday Muslims I meet in the US who observe Halal [dietary laws], fast on Ramadan, and take their religion seriously.

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### **Notes for chapter 7**

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Rabbi Yonassan Gershom for suggesting this chapter and for his many hours of research and editorial input in developing it. I am also grateful to Karima Bushnell, a Muslim multicultural educator in Minneapolis, for reviewing the material and making valuable suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> “Rabbis For Human Rights Host Cordoba House Founder,” *The Jewish Week*, December 7, 2010, [http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/new\\_york/rabbis\\_human\\_rights\\_host\\_cordoba\\_house\\_founder](http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/new_york/rabbis_human_rights_host_cordoba_house_founder)

<sup>3</sup> Mary Mederios Kent, *Population Reference Bureau Report*, “Do Muslims have More Children Than Other Women in Western Europe?” February, 2008, <http://www.prb.org/Articles/2008/muslimsineurope.aspx?p=1>

<sup>4</sup> “The Not So Great Islamist Menace,” Dan Gardner, *Ottawa Citizen*,

January 5, 2011,

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/news/great+Islamist+menace/4058778/story.html>

- <sup>5</sup> According to Breslov Hasid Lee (Tzvi) Weissman's blog, *Jihadi Jew*: "The root meaning of Jihad is to 'struggle,' to strive against ones own negativity in the pursuit of spiritual mastery and submission to the One true God." This struggle is known in Islam as "The Greater Jihad" – the conquest of oneself.
- <sup>6</sup> "Peter King Claims American Muslim Communities 'Do Not Cooperate' To Combat Terrorism," Ben Arm-Bruster, *Global and Domestic Security*, <http://thinkprogress.org/2010/10/28/peter-king-muslim-cooperate/>
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*



Anti-mosque protesters in New York play on negative stereotypes and fears.





American Muslim children at a rally in support of the Park51 “Cordoba House” Muslim center in Manhattan, August 22, 2010. The author, Richard Schwartz, also attended this supportive rally.



**“From the Arab Spring to Athens, to Occupy Wall Street to Moscow” – the cover of *Time* magazine names “The Protester” as Person of the Year for 2011.**

Above is an Occupy Wall Street demonstration in New York City, based in Zuccotti Park in the Wall Street financial district. They are mainly protesting social and economic inequality, corporate greed, corruption and influence over government — particularly from the financial services sector — and lobbyists. The protesters' slogan, "We are the 99%", refers to the difference in wealth in the U.S. between the wealthiest 1% and the rest of the population. The first Occupy protest was on September 17, 2011. This picture was taken on Day 40. Similar protests took place across the USA.

## Chapter 8

### **Which economic system is most consistent with Jewish values?**

*The pursuit of profit has led to the condition where the great treasures of natural resources are accumulated in the hands of the few individuals who, because of further profits, have brought to tens of millions of human beings pain, hunger and want. Does this not show clearly the wickedness of the present capitalist order, which is in glaring contradiction to the religious ethical tendencies of Judaism?... The fight for Socialism is the fight for human liberation . . . Moral rebirth and not mere economic reconstruction. The fight for Socialism . . . must be firstly a fight for values, higher spiritual values, infinite values.*

— Rabbi Abraham B. Bick<sup>1</sup>

Because the United States and so much of the world are facing great economic hardships, with very high debts and unemployment, and because many people are frustrated by the failure of our current economic system to meet their needs, this seems to be a good time to consider what economic arrangement and conditions would be most compatible with basic Jewish values. One can also make a strong case that climate change and many other current environmental threats as well as hunger, poverty, resource scarcities, and other social

problems are caused to a large extent by the desire of huge corporations and wealthy individuals to maximize their profits, without concern for the impact on people and the planet.

Socialism (and by this I mean “democratic socialism”) is being considered much more seriously these days than most people realize. A Pew Research Center poll released on May 4th, 2010, showed these surprising statistics:

- 29% of U.S. Americans say they have a positive reaction to the word “socialism.”
- Among those younger than 30, identical percentages react positively to “socialism” and “capitalism.” (43% each).
- 37% of the total population has a “negative reaction” to the word “capitalism.”

This growing disillusionment with our current economic set-up — full of corruption, favoritism, exploitation, chronic unemployment and under-employment, ecological destruction, poverty, manipulation of money and trading to benefit the few and the best-connected, and rampant crony capitalism, which is common to the right-wing Tea Party, the leftist shut-down Wall Street demonstrators, and middle-of-the-road union members and office workers — results from many sources. These include bailouts of risk-taking banks, corporate scandals, foreclosures, devastating medical emergencies, and environmental disasters.

A notorious example of such a disaster was the massive 2010 Gulf of Mexico oil leak. The corporate owner of the rig that caused the gusher, BP, was led at the time by CEO Tony Hayward, who told a group of Stanford graduate students in May 2010 that he made changes in the company because, “We [BP] had too many people that were working to save the world, we sort of lost track of the fact that our primary purpose in life is to create value for our shareholders”— an infamous quote widely viewed in a video clip on the Internet.

## **What do I mean by socialism?**

I want to clarify that by “socialism,” I do *not* mean Soviet-style communism or government control of all our businesses or personal assets. Private enterprise has value, if it is properly used and regulated. The Torah clearly provides for personal ownership of land, businesses, and moveable property, and the Talmud discusses this in great detail. What is being considered here is the responsibility of the community to take care of the more vulnerable members of society and to share resources equitably.

In many European democracies there is a political party called the “Social Democrats” or something similar, which combines democratic principles with certain socialist ideas such as universal health care, public ownership of mineral resources and utilities, etc. This is closer to what I mean — but it’s important to not get hung up on labels. Instead of saying “socialism,” perhaps we should speak of “Torah-based economics.” As with everything in this book, I am seeking to help return Judaism to Torah-based values, rather than assimilating things from the surrounding culture that may or may not be in tune with Judaism.

So what I mean by “socialism” is really a “cooperative economy” based on human solidarity and kinship. The practices of modern capitalism are a prime cause of ecological damage, poverty, hunger, resource scarcities, and war. For global sustainability, it is necessary that it be replaced by a more just and humane system, based on cooperation and empathy, rather than on excessive competitiveness.

I believe that the system most consistent with Jewish values is one of economic democracy: Democratic Socialism — or, as it is sometimes called nowadays, Social Democracy — somewhat modified in consonance with Jewish teachings, so that it might be considered as Torah-based economics.

## **But what, exactly, does this mean?**

First, let’s clearly indicate what it does *not* mean. As already explained above, it is certainly not the type of system of the former Soviet Union; it is not undemocratic and certainly

not oppressive; it does not involve a small elite who make the major decisions and control most of the wealth and power; it does not mean that you are told where to work, what to buy, where to live, what opinions to hold; it does not mean that you have no personal possessions and cannot own a home or a car.

Formulating a detailed program for Democratic Socialism is beyond the scope of this book. But some key features (all consistent with Jewish values) would include:

- High priority and value given to human life and well-being rather than money and possessions.
- People treated as ends, not means (consistent with the concept that people are created in God's image), demonstrating respect for their dignity, ability, and potential.
- Social ownership and democratic control of the major economic resources (such as oil, coal, natural gas, gold, diamonds and other major resources) for the benefit of everyone. This does not mean that every business would be taken over by the workers. It does mean that the important economic institutions of the country would be controlled by the people, directly or through elected representatives, rather than by private corporations that rarely consider the interests of common people.
- A more equitable distribution of income, wealth, and services.
- A broader distribution of power, with workers participating in decisions that affect them.
- Progressive taxes designed to reduce inequality, rather than to magnify it.

While not a socialist, Theodore Herzl believed that a revolutionary enterprise like Zionism could not succeed based solely on the capitalist market model. In his book *Altneuland*,

he pictured the future Land of Israel as a social welfare society, positioned between socialism and capitalism, in which natural resources – mineral wealth, land, and water – would be publicly controlled; most industry and agriculture would be run cooperatively, while individuals would still be involved in retail trade; society would provide all citizens with health, welfare, and education; and everyone would have to do two years of national service to staff social service institutions.

It is not enough merely to change the methods of production and distribution and to establish more democratic decision-making. It is also essential to try to change people's outlook and behavior. And that is exactly what Judaism tries to do: to transform the human being into a more compassionate, spiritual self who cares more about others. The Talmud even defines mercy and compassion as the essence of being a Jew: "Whoever is merciful to his fellow human beings is certainly of the children of our father Abraham, and whosoever is not merciful to his fellow human beings is certainly not of the children of our father Abraham." (Beza 32b) One purpose of educational and religious institutions would be to try to bring out the compassionate, empathetic, sharing nature of people.

### **Why should socialism be considered today?**

Many people may ask, "Why should I consider socialism? I'm doing well under capitalism. I have a good job and a home and am able to purchase what I need for my family. And I have the freedom to do what I want, work where I want, travel where I want." But are things really all that good for you and others? Many Americans today can't make the statements above, because an estimated 17 percent of Americans are either unemployed or underemployed, and many have lost their homes or are in danger of losing them. And we all have concerns about where society is going.

Stop and think about it: Are there areas near your home where you and family are afraid to go, especially at night? Is your transportation system as good as it could be? Are you concerned about threats from climate change, pollution, acid rain, and toxic wastes? Do you feel that our government is doing enough to make sure that foods are adequately inspected?

Are you concerned about layoffs of police officers, firefighters, sanitation workers, teachers, and others, as the wealthiest Americans and multinational corporations get continued tax breaks, and deficits soar? Do you ever consider that our well-being is built upon the exploitation of other people? Do you think people can really learn ethical, religious values in a society whose mottos often are “What’s in it for me?” and “Do unto others before they do unto me?”

Considering that the United States consumes a huge amount of the world’s resources, is this fair to the rest of the world? The psalmist says that “the Earth is the Lord’s,” not “The Earth belongs to humans to exploit as they wish.” As Jews, shouldn’t we be concerned with the well being of the world’s people?

An economic transformation is badly overdue. Unemployment and underemployment remain painfully high. Our climate is dangerously chaotic. The safety of our food and water and medicines and toys and breathable air is threatened. Toxic pollution flows from massive feedlots and creates dead spots in our seas. Our forests tumble. Our financial system is rocked by fraud and abuse, but the banks continue their perilous policies and go on awarding enormous bonuses to those who, in effect, robbed us all. Politicians are for sale. Corporations reap record profits but hoard their cash rather than investing in hiring. Vitally needed teachers, police officers, and firefighters are laid off.

### **How capitalism often violates Jewish values**

Judaism doesn’t recommend one type of economic system. However, its principles of social conduct are clear. The Torah is opposed to exploitation and to concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, with the resultant impoverishment of the many. The Torah desires that people should be able to work and enjoy the fruits of their labor. But some elements of modern capitalism are inconsistent with basic Jewish values of justice, compassion, consideration for the poor, concern for the dignity of every person, and love for our fellow humans:



- While Jewish values are epitomized in the visions of prophets, many capitalists dream mainly of profits. Many things are done in a capitalistic society not because they are just, righteous, or kind, but because they are profitable.
- While Judaism teaches, “love thy neighbor as thyself,” under capitalism the motto seems to be, as Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel put it, “suspect thy neighbor as thyself.” Our society and economy often train people to be selfish and antagonistic, not cooperative and sharing.
- While Judaism teaches that each person is created in God’s image and hence is of infinite worth, under capitalism people are often treated primarily as consumers. Advertisers do not attempt to educate people or to increase their sensitivity, but rather to appeal to their greed, vanity, insecurity, and competitiveness.
- While Judaism teaches that life is sacred and that we must make all possible efforts to save lives, under capitalism lives are often endangered to increase profits. The owners and operators of unregulated or poorly regulated gun shops, strip mines and underground mines, asthma-causing and mercury-spewing factories and power plants, and all kinds of dangerous and deadly products and industries spend many millions on propaganda and lobbying to evade their just responsibility. In recent years, there have been numerous recalls of dangerous products manufactured in countries where there are little or no safety regulations (such as China).
- While Judaism stresses *tzedek, tzedek tirdof* (“justice, justice shall you pursue”) and that God is sanctified through acts of justice, society is filled with injustice. There are great income gaps in the U.S. and Israel, two of the most unequal societies on earth, which have been widening in recent years. While a small minority of the world’s people lead lives devoted to consumption and waste, millions of God’s children lack adequate food, water, shelter, health care,

sanitary facilities, and education.

- While Judaism mandates that we practice compassion for animals and avoid inflicting unnecessary pain on them, animals are often treated like mere commodities to maximize profits.
- While Judaism asserts that each person is “his brother’s (or sister’s) keeper” and that “we must be kind to the stranger, for we were strangers in the land of Egypt,” under modern capitalism each person is primarily out for himself and his family. Primary attitudes include: “Me first,” “Cut services for others,” “Let ‘George’ do it,” and “Where’s mine?”
- While Judaism proclaims a jubilee every fifty years, when wealth is redistributed and property is returned to its original owner, under capitalism there are very large and increasing gaps in people’s wealth. The wealthiest 400 Americans have more wealth than the poorest 150 million Americans! Due to the tremendous power that wealth provides, these gaps are likely to continue growing, making unrest and violence more likely.
- While Judaism teaches that God is the Creator of all people and that one person (Adam) was created to teach our common ancestry and thus that there should be no prejudice against people because of race, religion, nationality, or gender, there is widespread discrimination in our society due to economic and social inequality. Some people fight each other for the scraps from the tables of the truly comfortable and well connected.

We have a moral duty to ask ourselves: Can modern capitalism (especially in its most isolating, harsh, and unfeeling versions) be reconciled with Judaism? Can a system that emphasizes the pursuit of personal financial gain for the few with little concern for the needs and welfare of the many be consistent with Jewish values? Under today’s corporate-dominated form of capitalism we have what philosopher

Richard Lichtman calls “the alienation of economic activity from moral concern.” Can Jews accept this separation of economic from moral concerns when we affirm a Creator whose laws and concern extend to every person and all forms of life?

Much of the current right-wing attitude toward the poor and disadvantaged comes not from authentic Jewish values, but from the teachings of the Protestant theologian, John Calvin (1509-1564), who taught a form of predestination in which prosperity was seen as a sign of God’s favor. Therefore, according to Calvin, using profits to help others rise economically was a violation of God's will. So popular has Calvinism become among American conservatives in recent years, that in 2010 the Texas Board of Education voted to replace Thomas Jefferson with John Calvin on their social studies list of people who most influenced American culture.<sup>2</sup>

Alisa Harris, a Christian journalist who was raised in a fundamentalist, right-wing community with a strongly Calvinistic approach, wrote in her 2011 memoir, *Raised Right: How I Untangled my Faith from Politics*:

“I used to think that anyone who was poor had only himself to blame, that America is a magical and glorious place so overflowing with opportunity that anyone who’s struggling is simply not working hard enough or looking hard enough or finds it more convenient to live off the hard work of others or would really rather just buy drugs than pay rent... When you believe hardship is a person’s own fault, it’s easy to look right through the suffering.”<sup>3</sup>

Harris had a rude awakening, however, when the recession hit her personally. Just as she and her fiancé were planning their wedding, his employer downsized and he lost his job. Her own salary was barely enough for them to survive. Both spent many months and hundreds of résumés looking for new jobs. “Now when I look at the unemployed and destitute,” she writes, “I see what I might become if my life moves just a few steps in the wrong direction.”<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, many Jews have also assimilated Calvinist ideas that are the antithesis of Torah-based economics.

Traditionally, Judaism has taught that if a person prospers, then it is their responsibility to care for “the widow, the orphan, and the stranger.” Yet today we see many Jews voting for candidates who would rather just throw the poor to their fate.

Many of the world’s people today face economic conditions similar to those indicated in the following passage from the book of Job (24:5-11):

Lonely as wild asses in the wilderness  
They go forth to their labor;  
They must hunt the desert for sustenance,  
There is no harvest for the homeless.  
They must harvest fields that are not theirs...  
Naked must they pass the night for lack of clothes.  
They have no covering from the cold.  
They are drenched by the downpour of the mountains,  
They must embrace the base rock for want of shelter.  
They must go naked, without garments;  
Hungry, they must carry the sheaves.  
Shut in by walls, they must press the oil;  
Thirsty, they must press the winepress.

Under a profit-based system where each person seeks personal gain first and foremost above all else, the following words of Jeremiah are also relevant today:

Run to and fro through the streets...  
Look and take note!  
Search her squares to see if you can find a man  
One who does justice and seeks truth; . . .  
But they all alike had broken the yoke,  
They had burst the bonds...  
From the least to the greatest of them,  
Everyone is greedy for unjust gain;  
And from prophet to priest everyone deals falsely...  
There is nothing but oppression within her.  
(Jeremiah 5:1,5; 6:13; 8:10; 6:6)

The Prophets were well aware of the injustices that come with corruption and greed. Many modern rabbis are also aware

of this connection. The fact that Jewish ethical teachings are inconsistent with an insufficiently regulated profit-based system was explicitly stated in a pronouncement of the Rabbinical Assembly of America (rabbis of the Conservative movement) in 1934, in the midst of the Great Depression. Considering that we are currently trying to emerge from the severest recession since then, I think their statement still merits our attention:

In all of Jewish ethical tradition, it is assumed as axiomatic that men must live for each other, that mutual aid and human cooperation are indispensable both for peace in society and for moral excellence in the individual. Judaism has always asserted the brotherhood of human beings. If this concept has any meaning for life at all, it insists that men must live cooperatively for the common good.

We therefore hold an individualistic, profit-inspired economy to be in direct conflict with the ideals of religion. We maintain that our present system, based, as it is, on acquisitiveness and selfish competition, is in practice a denial of human brotherhood. It exalts the aggrandizement of the individual above the interests of the group, it emphasizes the competitive rather than the co-operative elements in human character. It means that our social order is based on the theorem of "Every man for himself" rather than on the ideal of mutual aid...

We hold that only a cooperative economy, only one that has for its objective the enrichment of all rather than profit for a few—only such an economy can be moral, can elevate man and can function successfully.

## **Socialist/cooperative concepts in Jewish history and tradition**

When the Jews wandered in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt and in the early years after settling in the land of Israel, the people were strongly egalitarian; there was no hierarchy of kings or rulers. Decisions were reached democratically by the assemblage of one man from each family

or tribe. And there was essentially communal ownership of the wealth-producing property. The rights to pasture lands and water were vested in the tribe as a unit, and private property was minimal. Later, in the days of Samuel, when the people clamored for a king in order to be like the surrounding nations, God told Samuel to warn the people about what would happen with such centralization of wealth and power:

This will be the practice of the king who will rule over you: He will take your sons and appoint them as his charioteers and horsemen, and they will have to run before his chariot... or they will have to plow his fields and make his weapons and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters as perfumers and bakers; he will seize your choice fields, vineyards and olive groves and give them to his courtiers... He will take a tenth part of your flocks and you will become his slaves. The day will come when you will cry out because of the king whom you yourselves have chosen; and the Lord will not answer you on that day. (I Samuel 8:11-18)

If we substitute “international corporations” for “kings,” we can see a kind of similar exploitation today. We see CEOs (the corporate kings) garnering millions of dollars in bonuses each year, while, at the same time; they lay off workers in the name of making even greater profits. The disparity between a CEO’s income and the average worker’s salary is greater than ever before. Is this really what God wants?

Division of property was initially part of the Torah’s plan to insure social equality. Originally, Joshua distributed land among the Israelite tribes, using the principle that “To the more [larger tribe] you shall give the greater inheritance, and to the fewer [smaller tribe] you shall give the lesser inheritance” (Numbers 26:54). This first distribution of land was on the basis of social need, not individual power or privilege.

To avoid conditions whereby, due to bad fortune, a family might be compelled to sell or mortgage its land and thereby suffer for generations, a complete redistribution of land every fifty years was provided for in the Jubilee law: “In the year of

the Jubilee, you shall return every man unto his possession” (Leviticus 25:13). This law protecting property rights in ancient Israel was designed to insure social equality. Therefore, the Torah’s concept of property rights was very different from that of modern capitalism, which tends to lead to great concentrations of wealth, perpetuated generation after generation, while poverty also persists from one generation to another.

A literal Jubilee Year would be impossible to carry out today, and everyone’s property cannot be confiscated and redistributed every 50 years. But we can still learn the basic principle behind this amazing law: it is not socially responsible to allow vast amounts of wealth to accumulate in the hands of the few while allowing others to suffer in abject poverty for generations.

The underlying message and meaning of the Jubilee Year, as with other “commandments dependent on the land,” such as the laws related to leaving the gleanings of the harvest and the corners of the field for the poor, is the principle that “the Earth is the Lord’s” (Psalm 24:1). In proclaiming the Jubilee Year, the Torah states the logic behind this periodic revolution in property rights: “For the land is mine; for you are strangers and settlers with me” (Leviticus 25:23).

In the Torah, a person’s rights to property are not those of an outright owner, but rather of a steward who is a co-partner with God in preserving and protecting the earth and seeing that its resources are used for the benefit of everyone. As Rabbi Eleazer of Bertothas says, “Give unto God of what is God’s, seeing that you and what you have are God’s” (*Pirke Avot* 3:8). King David expresses a similar idea: “For all things come of You and out of Your own have we given You” (1 Chronicles 29:14).

The Sabbatical Year included the cancellation of financial debts in order to limit inequality and excessive accumulation of capital. The Torah’s prohibition on taking interest for loans served the same goal. Both of these arrangements were later by-passed for pragmatic reasons, but the basic idea behind them is that property should be used for one’s own (simple) living and for the common good, not for the enormous accumulation of wealth.

With the income gap in the U.S. very large and growing, the concept of a Jubilee year in which wealth would be redistributed is intriguing (if impractical). The top one percent of all U.S. income earners made 23.5 percent of all U. S. income in 2007, more than the poorest 50 percent. The percentage of income for the top one percent has almost tripled since the mid-1970s. Eighty percent of all new income earned from 1980 to 2005 went to that top one percent, which now owns more wealth than the bottom 90 percent.<sup>5</sup> With the middle class collapsing and the rich getting much richer, the United States now has the most unequal distribution of income and wealth of any major country on earth.

Yet, most of the very rich want more and more, and they seem unconcerned about damaging the existing political and social order to get it. During the 2010 U.S. midterm elections, billionaires poured hundreds of millions of dollars of secret money into the campaign, helping to elect dozens of ultraconservative Republican members of Congress. Having made their investment, they expect their congressional “employees” to produce, so they will have “the best congress that money can buy.” Republicans in Congress seem to be on board as they unanimously support continued tax breaks for the wealthy and for major corporations, while opposing continued unemployment benefits for the long-term unemployed and supporting major cuts in many programs that benefit the middle class and the poor.

The Jewish view that private property rights are not absolute but are subjected to proper regulation and civic authority and must be guided by the common good, and that property should not be wasted or exploited in damaging ways, but rather used sustainably, is exemplified by the many *mitzvot* obliging Jewish farmers to share with the poor:

- A corner of the field (*Pe'ah*) had to be left unharnessed; it was the property of the poor. (Leviticus 19; 9-10)
- If less than three ears of corn were dropped during the harvest (*Leket*), they were not to be gleaned, but were to be left for the poor. (Leviticus 19: 9- 10)



- A sheaf forgotten by the farmer (*Shik'khah*) could not be retrieved but must be left for the poor. (Deuteronomy 24: 19-21)
- Every third year, a part of the tithe of the harvest (*Ma'aser Ani*) had to be set aside for the poor. (Deuteronomy 14:28)
- Prior to every Purim, *matanot l'evyonim*, a special donation for the poor is collected.
- Before Passover, there are large campaigns for *ma'ot chittim*, donations to enable poor people to purchase matzah, wine, and other Passover needs.

These principles not only help the poor, they also help the landowner by teaching him to “let go” and say “*dayenu*, enough, I did not create this bounty: it ultimately belongs to God.” The same is true of any business, not just agriculture.

Another important point to consider is the open hostility of the Jewish tradition toward the arrogantly rich and their “conspicuous consumption,” when the desired state is modest, limited, self-restrained living. The prophet Amos rails against such extravagance at the expense of others:

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion,  
And to those who feel secure  
    on the mountains of Samaria...  
Woe to those who lie upon beds of ivory,  
And stretch themselves upon their couches,  
And eat lambs from the flock,  
And calves from the midst of the stall;  
Who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp...  
Who drink wine in bowls,  
And anoint themselves in the finest oils,  
But are not grieved on the ruin of Joseph!  
(Amos 6:4-6)

The last line tells us that it is not the enjoyment of good

food and wine per se that the prophet denounces; it is because “those who are at ease in Zion” were “not grieved at the ruin of [the tribes of] Joseph,” that had been conquered and decimated by the invading Assyrians. Amos felt it was a terrible sin to indulge in such luxuries while one’s fellow Jews had been killed or exiled, and had not even the barest necessities of life. As the modern saying goes, we should “live simply that others might simply live.”

An element of the Ten Commandments, “You shall not steal,” along with the subsequent prohibition of coveting are reminders not to make material gain the purpose of our lives. Even when we do not actually steal, we are in a way stealing from the poor when we are overindulgent and wasteful, or when we exploit the resources of Third World countries in order to increase our own country’s power and wealth, or when we stand idly by the starvation and degradation of others when we could do something to help.

Since, as the Torah clearly states, everything belongs to God, the Jewish principle that the rich are obligated to take care of the poor naturally derives from God’s ownership of all. The Hebrew word *tzedakah* means both charity and justice. Why? Because Judaism considers charity to be an act of justice. The Torah teaches that people in need have a right to dignity and succor, to food, clothing and shelter, and that those who are more fortunate have a moral responsibility to help those who are in need. According to Jewish law, it is unjust — even illegal — for Jews to not give charity to those in need. This can be contrasted with those political conservatives in the secular world, who want to cut taxes for the rich and maintain loopholes for corporations, while making draconian cuts in programs of food, shelter, and medical care for the indigent. This goes against Jewish principles.

In addition to laws about charity, the Torah also provides instruction in honest business practices:

You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length, of weight, or in quantity. Just balances, just weights, a just *ephah* [the standard dry measure] and a just *hin* [a measure for liquids], shall you have. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of

Egypt (Leviticus 19: 35, 36).

The rabbis of the Talmud gave concrete expression to the many Torah and prophetic teachings regarding justice and righteousness. They indicate in detail what is proper when conducting business. Rabbinic literature translates prophetic ideals into specific laws for the marketplace concerning duties of employers to employees and of workers to their employers: fair prices; the avoidance of false weights and measures; proper business contracts; and fair methods of competition. For example, wages for day laborers must be given on the day that work is done, not delayed, in order to preserve the dignity and provide for the basic needs of poor workers. (Deuteronomy 24:10-15) This principle applies to some extent even today, where field workers harvesting produce often live hand-to-mouth, and cannot wait for weeks to be paid.

The sages were also very harsh towards attempts to take away a person's livelihood by unfair competition (Sanhedrin 81a). Their overall view of business ethics can be summarized by the verses "And you shall do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:18), and "better is a little with righteousness than great revenues with injustice" (Proverbs 16:8).

The Talmudic sages were very strict about their personal ethical standards, too, as the following story illustrates:

Reb Saphra had wine to sell. A certain customer came in to buy wine at a time when Reb Saphra was saying the *Shema* prayer [which cannot be interrupted by conversation]. The customer said, "Will you sell me the wine for such and such an amount?" When Reb Saphra did not respond, the customer thought he was not satisfied with the price and raised his bid. When Reb Saphra had finished his prayer, he said, "I decided in my heart to sell the wine to you at the first price you mentioned; therefore I cannot accept your higher bid." (*Sheil'tot, Parshat Vayechi*)

Consistent with these principles, the Talmud, though firmly recognizing personal property rights, did not consider

such rights to be unlimited. They often restricted them, even eliminating them in some instances for the common good. For example, the *halachah* (Jewish law) prohibits profit related to “fraudulent misrepresentation” (Baba Metzia 49b). It opposes monopolization of basic necessities and bans hoarding for the purpose of increasing prices (Baba Batra 90b). The Talmud prohibits the export of articles of food to foreign countries if this would increase the domestic price of these articles (Baba Batra 90b). For the common good, the rabbis even justify the confiscation of private property in some cases (Yebamot 89b; Gittin 36b).

A good example of this is a case in the Talmud concerning a well of water essential to people in a village. The rabbis concluded that the title to the well should not be maintained in trust by any one individual or small group, but by the entire community, so as to be open and accessible to all, without cost.<sup>6</sup> Judaism points toward communal possession and control of those social enterprises that are essential to life. The earth’s vast resources should be developed for the welfare of every person, and not for the enrichment of the few.

During the recent US banking crisis, the credit unions—which are member-owned cooperatives, not “banks” in the usual sense—did not experience the same economic collapse as did the corporate banks. Credit union members elect their officials and do not have CEOs drawing enormous salaries. They also have a say in how their money is being invested. Credit unions are, in the most positive sense, collective, even socialist institutions.

Interestingly, both the Reform and Conservative rabbinical groups have passed resolutions supporting this principle of public ownership. In 1934, (in the midst of the Great Depression), the Social Justice Commission of the Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform) stated that for society’s safety, basic social enterprises should not be left in the control of private groups, which consider private profit ahead of community service. They advocated the nationalization of banking, power plants, housing, transportation and communication systems.<sup>7</sup> In that same year, the Rabbinical Assembly (of Conservative rabbis) also stated that some social enterprises, such as banking and credit, power,

transportation, and communication, were so essential to community welfare that they must be publicly owned.<sup>8</sup>

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, many Jews were actively involved in revolutionary socialist and trade union movements in Europe and the U.S. in reaction to the exploitative conditions of the time. They felt that the salvation of the Jewish people could only come about as part of the salvation of humanity. Morris Hillquit, a Jewish labor movement leader in New York in the early years of the twentieth century, gave a typical view:

I am a socialist because I cannot be anything else. I cannot accept the ugly world of capitalism, with its brutal struggles and needless suffering, its archaic and irrational economic structure, its cruel social contrasts, its moral callousness and spiritual degradation.<sup>9</sup>

There are also many Hasidic stories about how great rabbis chose to live simply in order to give more to others. This does not mean we should live in abject poverty. In fact, Jewish law forbids giving away all or most of one's possessions, lest one become a burden on the community. But we can and should ask ourselves if our current lifestyles could be more in harmony with the world around us. As the Jewish community in America has become more affluent, we seem to be forgetting many of the Torah's communitarian and compassionate principles.

The Talmud teaches that when we die and go before the Heavenly Court, the first thing we will be asked is: "Were you honest in your business dealings?" (Shabbat 31a.) Not "Do you believe in God?" or "Did you keep kosher?" or "Did you observe Passover?" but *how did you behave in the marketplace?* The business world is the hardest place to be fair and honest, so if you are honest there, the likelihood is you are an upstanding person in other areas as well.

Whether we call it "social democracy" or "Torah-based economics," the message is the same. Based on such Jewish values as justice, compassion, and concern for the poor, Jews should be in the forefront of efforts to establish an economic system that can provide dignity and basic necessities to every

person. Jews should work for a more cooperative system consistent with Torah teachings: elevating individuals through religious ethical education, forming worker's cooperatives like Israel's kibbutzim and moshavim, and striving for peaceful and harmonious progress that will benefit all of humanity.

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## Notes for chapter 8

<sup>1</sup> Statement of Rabbi Abraham B. Bick, a disciple of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, and a fighter for religious, ethical socialism in the early twentieth century, quoted in a thesis *Religious Ethical Socialism: The Origins and Philosophy of the Jewish Religious Labor Movement*, by Max Bressler, Hebrew Union College, New York, Class of 1941.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html>

<sup>3</sup> Alisa Harris, *Raised Right: How I Untangled My Faith from Politics*, Waterbrook Press, Colorado Springs, CO, 2011, pp. 184-85.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 187.

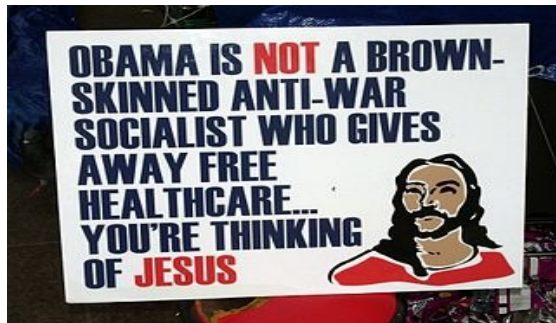
<sup>5</sup> All statistics in this paragraph are from Senator Bernie Sanders, "Now is the Time to Roll Back this Orgy of Greed," <http://blog.buzzflash.com/node/11968>

<sup>6</sup> Sidney E. Goldstein discusses this in *The Synagogue and Social Ethics* (Block Pubs, New York, 1955, p. 337.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 338, 339

<sup>9</sup> Irving Howe and Kenneth Libo, editors, *How We Lived* (New York: Signet, 1981), p. 190.



Given that Jesus was a Jew, this sign is not so far off. Jews have always had a mandate to care for the poor.

## Chapter 9

### What foreign policy is most consistent with Jewish values?

*Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. — Dwight D. Eisenhower*

*And the work of righteousness shall be peace; And the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever. — Isaiah 32:17*

*Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind. — John F. Kennedy*

With the United States spending more money on the military than all the other major powers combined, fighting apparently unwinnable wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, struggling against terrorism, and squeezing vital social services while expanding the military's budget, it seems appropriate to consider an alternate U.S. foreign policy, one consistent with basic Jewish values.

As Lester Brown, President of Earth Policy Institute, points out in the preface to his book, *World On The Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse*, there is a

pressing need to “redefine security for the twenty-first century.” He states: “The [primary] threats to our future now are not armed aggression, but rather climate change, population growth, water shortages, poverty, rising food prices, and failing states.”

### **Are religious Jews more hawkish than other Jews?**

Although there are Orthodox Jewish peace activists, such as the members of Oz v”Shalom/Netivot Shalom discussed in chapter 6, I have found many religious Jews to be especially antagonistic toward Muslims and also very hawkish. I have heard some say that Israel should just destroy the Palestinians or drive them out of Israel and the territories altogether. Several Orthodox Jews have told me that the United States should just bomb Muslim countries back to the Stone Age one by one, since “the only thing Muslims understand is force.”

In addition to the moral callousness of such positions, these Jews ignore the effects that unprovoked and massive violence committed by the United States and Israel would have on world opinion. We would become pariah states. Furthermore, such actions would likely trigger a severe recession or a depression, and would greatly increase prospects for antisemitism, anti-Americanism, instability, terrorism, and war.

A 2006 study found that Jews who attend synagogue services at least once a week were twice as likely to support the war in Iraq and to define themselves as politically conservative as Jews who seldom or never go to synagogue.<sup>1</sup> Of course I am not advocating that religious Jews go to synagogue less often. Rather, I am suggesting that they consider and apply the rich Jewish teachings on peace and justice, some of which were discussed in chapter 2.

Some of the reasons for this hawkishness are quite understandable. Because the Soviet Union brutally oppressed Jews for decades, many Jews supported tough U.S. policies toward the USSR and escalation of the arms race, even after we and the Soviet Union had the nuclear capacities to destroy each other (and, indeed, the entire world) hundreds of times over. Also, because implacable enemies have surrounded Israel since the moment of her birth in 1948, Jews have supported



significant arms expenditures by Israel and by the United States, Israel's main and sometimes only ally. But are these policies still viable today?

## **A critique of present United States foreign policy**

Stalemates and quagmires that developed during the United States' wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, as well as Israel's wars in Lebanon and Gaza, suggest that overwhelming conventional forces cannot effectively combat terrorism and guerilla wars. Other approaches must be found. The United States' invasion of Iraq and the chaotic and ill-planned efforts at "nation-building" that followed have been frustrating and ineffective, at the expense of America's influence, security, and economy.

It was a great thing for the people of Iraq, and for democracy in the Arab world in general, that the mass-murderer and tyrant Saddam Hussein was overthrown. But in many ways, the cure has been worse than the disease. The American public was misled into thinking that Saddam had or was building weapons of mass destruction, although UN inspectors on the ground were not finding any evidence of this – making Iraq a very unpopular and, many believe, unnecessary war. By taking our attention away from the war in Afghanistan where the 9/11 terrorist attacks originated, we minimized the chances of quickly finding Osama Bin Laden, winning the war there, and permanently exiting the Taliban. Now we are bogged down in Afghanistan and looking toward a final withdrawal no sooner than 2014.

Thousands of U.S. and allied soldiers have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, and many more have been wounded and traumatized. Many soldiers have served four or more tours of duty, and the ability of the United States to meet other military threats has been greatly damaged. Over 100,000 Iraqi and Afghan Muslims have been killed, many more wounded and/or made homeless. This has increased hostility toward the U.S. and has given propaganda victories to terrorists.

And all the above has been at a staggering financial cost. Imagine what could have been done with the estimated \$3 trillion that the Iraq war will end up costing when all the

expenses, including expensive medical and rehabilitative care for many thousands of wounded and traumatized soldiers, are taken into account. That money could have been far better spent to make the United States more secure, to rebuild our infrastructure, to reduce unemployment and poverty, and to respond to many other pressing social needs. Instead, we are now laying off teachers, police officers, firefighters, sanitation workers, and others, and closing senior citizen centers and other vital resources. Plus we are considering cuts in family planning, environmental protection, health care, college aid for students, food inspection, veterans' benefits, and many other crucial social services.

### **Should the U.S. or Israel attack Iran?**

When it comes to Iran and its efforts to develop nuclear weapons, a common response from my fellow congregants and others in the Jewish community is that we should long since have bombed them or be preparing to do so soon. Although I agree that it is very important that Iran not develop nuclear weapons, I also believe we should consider the many negative consequences an attack on Iran would likely have.

A comprehensive case against such an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities is in a recent study of Israel's offensive options by Abdullah Toukan and Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.<sup>2</sup> They observe that:

- There is no guarantee of success. Limited aerial resources would permit Israel to target only three sites among Iran's many nuclear development centers. Pinpoint accuracy would be needed to penetrate deeply buried, thick reinforced concrete and impact underground facilities. Even if the three known sites were destroyed, it is suspected that Iran has several other secret facilities for enriching uranium, and the Iranians would certainly increase such efforts after an attack. Therefore, there is no guarantee that a strike against Iran would finish off its nuclear program or even slow it down for more than a few years.

- An Israeli attack would likely spur Iran to continue and possibly accelerate their nuclear program, in an effort to obtain a reliable deterrence against future Israeli attacks.
- Israel could lose large numbers of planes and lives during an attack. Since Iran has built an extensive aerial-defense system, it would be difficult for Israeli planes to reach their targets safely.
- Israeli aircraft would need to be refueled both en route to and when returning from Iran. The IAF (Israeli Air Force) would have difficulty finding an area above which the tankers could cruise without being detected and possibly attacked.
- An ecological disaster and many deaths from released radiation could occur, affecting surrounding nations besides Iran, thereby further increasing hatred of Israel and provoking military and terrorist responses.
- Iran would likely launch retaliatory attacks against Israel, American military forces in Iraq, and Western interests in the region. These attacks would likely include ballistic missiles — some with biological, chemical, and radiological warheads— targeting Israel's civilian and military centers. Iran possesses missiles whose range covers all of Israel.
- Iran would likely use Hamas and Hezbollah to launch rocket attacks and suicide bombers against Israel. Recent events have demonstrated Hezbollah's vastly expanded rocket capability and Hamas' ability to fire Qassams from the Gaza Strip. During the second Lebanon War, Hezbollah launched 4,000 rockets from South Lebanon, which nearly paralyzed northern Israel for a month. Their supply has since been replenished and enhanced; it now encompasses an estimated 40,000 rockets.
- An Israeli strike on Iran would further increase instability in

the Middle East. The Iranians would likely use proxies to stir up trouble in many areas.

- The Iranians would also likely try to disrupt the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf to the West. Oil prices would soar due to the unstable conditions and possible disruptions. Steps to recover from the current recession would be set back, with even worse economic conditions resulting.
- United States relations with Arab allied nations would likely suffer if we attacked Iran or were perceived to have given Israel a green light or cooperated with Israel in any other way. Although recent Wikileaks materials show that some Arab leaders hope that the U.S. will attack Iran, Muslim populations would likely demand that there be retaliations against the U.S. and Israel. Whatever the ruling dictators may prefer, a recent Brookings poll showed that Arabs ranked the major threats to the region as Israel (88 percent), the United States (77 percent) and Iran (10 percent).
- There would likely be a sharp increase in terrorism against Jews worldwide.

In summary: There is far from a guarantee that an Israeli (or United States) strike on Iranian nuclear facilities would be successful and there are many possible harmful effects of such an attack. It is crucial that Iran not be permitted to develop nuclear weapons and thereby precipitate a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, but military methods can't accomplish that. It is more effective to deploy serious economic sanctions along with diplomatic isolation and punishment.

Iran must be convinced that any nuclear attack on Israel or any other country will result in immediate devastation of Iranian cities, while cooperating with the west and the international community could lead to many economic and diplomatic benefits for them.

Along with most people, I hope and pray that Iran does not acquire a nuclear capacity, and I support strong sanctions and other approaches that may get Iran to change its strategy.

But we also should remember that for many years the US and the former Soviet Union built many thousands of nuclear weapons and kept them on trigger alert with a strategy of “mutually assured destruction” that threatened the entire world. Fortunately, neither side was crazy enough to use these weapons, but we came close when the Soviet Union brought nuclear weapons into Cuba, and we threatened attacking Soviet ships that were trying to end a blockade of Cuba. While the present Iranian regime is certainly evil, even denying that the Holocaust occurred, it would be suicidal for them to attack Israel with nuclear weapons.

The world would, of course, be far better off without a nuclear-armed Iran. But we should remember the deep-seated Iranian resentment of the 1953 coup, which installed the Shah, ejected an elected Iranian government, and the subsequent U.S. aid, which provided the Shah with the weapons to suppress and torture his opponents. Iran also recognizes that if Iraq had actually possessed nuclear weapons, the U.S. would likely never have invaded that country – hence their desire to have such weapons today, in the belief that it will deter a U.S. attack. Threatening military action will likely increase Iran’s determination to develop nuclear weapons.

## **Toward a more rational foreign policy**

Perhaps now is the time to consider another United States foreign policy, one that will be consistent with Jewish values and can also increase the security of the United States, Israel, and all of the world’s people.

We live in a very dangerous world today, one with threats of a different nature and magnitude than those that past generations faced. Major battlefield conflicts are less likely, but there are greater threats of battles with enemies hiding among a large civilian population. The U.S. wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan, Israeli wars in Gaza and Lebanon, and the Soviet war in Afghanistan show how difficult it is to win guerilla wars. Terrorism is another significant danger, one that is elusive and hard to prevent or fight with conventional methods. Attempts to oppose terrorism can have unexpected effects and blowback.

## **Reducing terrorism**

One problem in developing a thoughtful and balanced foreign policy is that most people see the world in terms of black and white, good versus evil, us against them. They prefer to demonize people and groups who are not like them and to score debating points, rather than looking at situations from various perspectives in order to seek greater understanding, common ground, and solutions.

As we discussed in chapter 7, many Americans believe that a significant number of Muslims are evil and are plotting to take over the world. Many also assume that the U.S. is innocent of any blame, that our actions have nothing to do with hatred of the U.S., and that we therefore do not need to rethink anything and change.

Difficult as it may be, if we wish to reduce threats of terrorism, we should consider whether American actions are at least partially responsible for the antagonism toward the United States and the West, and whether or not this contributes in part to the growth of terrorism. The United States does many wonderful things across the globe such as providing much aid when tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, volcanoes, and other disasters strike other nations. But we have also done many things that lead others to view the U.S. harshly as an imperial power.

In 2004, a task force commissioned by then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to study the causes of terrorism concluded that “Muslims do not hate our freedom, but rather, they hate our policies,” specifically, “American direct intervention in the Muslim world” and what they regard as our “one-sided support in favor of Israel,” support for Islamic tyrannies in several countries, including Egypt and Saudi Arabia; and, most of all, “the American occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan.”<sup>3</sup>

Another comprehensive study by Robert Pape, a University of Chicago political science professor and former Air Force lecturer, concluded that the prime cause of suicide bombings is not hatred of our freedoms or inherent violence in

Islamic culture, nor it is a desire to establish worldwide *sharia* rule. Rather, it is our “foreign military occupations.”<sup>4</sup> Drawing on data from a six-year study of suicide terrorist attacks around the world that was partially funded by the Defense Department’s Defense Threat Reduction Agency, Pape and his research team found that the common cause of most suicide terrorism around the world since 1980 is military occupation. Reporting on his findings, Pape stated: “We have lots of evidence now that when you put the foreign military presence in, it triggers suicide terrorism campaigns... and that when the foreign forces leave, it takes away almost 100% of the terrorist campaign.”

These and other reports describe how Muslims are angered when foreign militaries bomb, invade, and occupy their countries, and when Western powers interfere in their internal affairs, sometimes overthrowing or covertly manipulating their governments. Historically, nations have always objected to being invaded, occupied, and bombed by an occupying power. So

we should not be surprised that people resent us doing the same. Continuation of U.S. military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan may be counterproductive to reducing terrorism, because we are creating additional angry people who may consider turning to terrorism as revenge for what they consider our unjust and harmful actions in their country.

Long before the U.S. invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, there was a long United States history of interventions abroad to further our interests. Major General Smedley D. Butler described in a 1933 talk how he rose through the ranks of the Marine Corps by “being a high class muscle man for big business, for Wall Street and for the bankers... a racketeer for capitalism.” He was rewarded with honors, medals and promotions because, as he expressed it:

I helped make Mexico, especially Tampico, safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is

long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909... I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China I helped to see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.<sup>5</sup>

Ralph McGehee, who served in the CIA from 1952 to 1977, gives a more recent analysis in the introduction to his 1983 book, *Deadly Deceits: My 25 Years in the CIA*. He writes:

My view, backed by 25 years of experience is, quite simply, that the CIA is the covert action arm of the presidency. Most of its money, manpower and energy go into covert operations that... include backing dictators and overthrowing democratically elected governments... The CIA uses disinformation, much of it aimed at the U.S. people to mold opinion... The U.S. installs foreign leaders, arms their armies, and empowers their police to help those leaders repress an angry, defiant people... The CIA-empowered leaders represent only a small fraction who kill, torture and impoverish their own people to maintain their position of privilege.

The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. was also very critical of U.S. foreign policy. He left behind a strong anti-imperialist message that sharply questioned the very nature of the “American Empire.”<sup>6</sup> When still a graduate student, King wrote of threats from the “False God of Nationalism,” which he considered a kind of pseudo-religion. To King, “my country right or wrong” was the watchword of this religion. Its preachers, absolutely convinced of its supremacy, were determined to persecute anyone who questioned its tenets.

In later years, King was sharply critical of the U.S. war in Vietnam, in spite of the great backlash he knew he would receive for that criticism, even from some fellow Civil Rights leaders. He stated that the U.S. was the “largest purveyor of violence in the world.” He recognized the great cost of the war in terms of increased poverty and cuts to basic services and stated that “the bombs that are falling in Vietnam are exploding



at home” in American cities.

A primary force propelling U.S. policy has been and remains the protection of U.S. corporate interests, regardless of the undemocratic nature or negative human rights record of the groups and governments with whom we have allied ourselves. As mentioned previously, the U.S. government in August 1953 helped undermine the democratically elected Iranian government of Mohammad Mosadegh and installed the Shah in power. The Shah subsequently used widespread repression and torture in a dictatorship that lasted until the 1979 Islamic revolution, which also has produced tyranny, quashing demonstrations, violating civil liberties, and rigging elections, to stay in power.

The U.S. has also supported dictatorships in the Philippines, Haiti, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chile, Spain, Portugal, and many other countries. We have even backed dictators like Saddam Hussein and terrorists like Osama bin Laden when it was in our interest. Both Democratic and Republican administrations have supported repressive Arab regimes, with increasingly counterproductive results. This made the U.S. appear hypocritical and lose credibility with Arab publics and has provided an important recruiting tool for Al Qaeda.

Given the above and other examples in U.S. history, it is not surprising that some people do not look on the United States as kindly as most Americans do. I believe that part of the battle against terror has to include changing the way America acts worldwide, which would help reshape how the world views us. Anti-Americanism costs the United States the cooperation of other nations in dealing with such global problems as terrorism, climate change, nuclear proliferation, HIV/AIDS, disease epidemics, and potential security crises, whether in North Korea, Iran, Sudan, Yemen, the Taiwan Strait, or elsewhere.

### **Toward a “Marshall Plan” for the world: to rescue the planet, reconstruct our world, lift up the poor around the globe, and improve relations between nations**

Radical new ideas are needed to improve conditions for the world’s many displaced and desperately hungry people and

to improve relations between peoples and nations. This would also decrease the dangers of terrorism and war. One possible (though very difficult to achieve) approach is for the United States, along with all the other developed nations, including Israel, to lead a global campaign to greatly reduce poverty, hunger, illiteracy, illness, pollution, and climate change. This might be done by applying on a worldwide scale the successful model of the Marshall Plan, suggested and led by General George Marshall after World War II. Marshall recognized that if Europe were left in a state of social and economic devastation, the resulting discontent could lead to another war, as it did after World War I. His plan was designed to help prevent this.

Under the Marshall Plan, the United States rebuilt post-World War II Europe, rescuing millions from starvation and reconstructing entire cities and countries, thereby winning friends and allies, reducing strife, revolution, violence, and even creating customers and markets for US industries.

A similar plan, on a more global scale, has been proposed by Rabbi Michael Lerner and the Interfaith Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP).<sup>7</sup> Their plan seeks a new strategy for the U.S., one based on “generosity, not domination, in its foreign policy.” To help end centuries of war and violence and attempts to dominate others, they are calling for “a fundamentally new approach that emphasizes that generosity and genuine caring for others can be a much more effective and morally coherent approach to human security, peace, and development.” They point out that a new paradigm is needed today, a “Strategy of Generosity,” that aims to “reestablish trust and hope among the peoples of the world” in order to reduce world poverty and save the global environment from climate change and the many additional current environmental threats.

The NSP wants to shift a foreign policy based on self-interest to one that considers “what best serves all the people on this planet and best serves the survival of the planet itself.” They argue that because of the interconnectedness of all people on the planet, “the best interests of America and the best interests of our children and grandchildren are best served by considering the best interests of everyone else, and the best interests of the planet...” rather than to frame things in terms of

narrow self-interest. They believe that the plan will only work if it is supported for the right reasons, with the “Strategy of Generosity” at the core, and global common good as the primary goal.

Such a worldwide Marshall Plan would be hard to administer and a tough sell to the wealthier countries that would have to provide the funding. On the other hand, we are currently spending billions of dollars on defense of the old paradigm, which is no longer working. Our current course is an unsustainable one, which will in all probability lead to greatly increased famines, wars, and chaos.

One or two percent of the GDP of the richer nations could be applied, if focused properly, to help poorer peoples become self-supporting; to combat diseases which ravage poorer populations and ultimately endanger all people; to reverse deforestation and pollution and destructive energy uses which threaten the planet; to provide education to millions of children who do not currently receive it; and to provide dignity, hope, drinkable water, adequate nutrition, and safe living environments in many of the nations where those precious commodities are much too scarce.

Essentials of the plan developed by the Network of Spiritual Progressives include:

- Providing enough funding to greatly reduce global poverty, homelessness, hunger, inadequate education, inadequate health care, plus restore the global environment...”
- Creating an unbiased, international nongovernmental mechanism for receiving and properly distributing the funds.
- Funding the plan in a way that is “ environmentally sensitive, respectful of native cultures, safeguarded against corruption, protected from manipulation to serve corporate profit motives or the interests of elites, and empowering of the people in each region.
- Governing the funding agency or mechanism “by a board of

ethicists, religious leaders, poets, writers, social theorists, philosophers, economists, scientists, and social change activists, all of whom have demonstrated that they give higher priority to the well-being of others than to the well-being of corporations or wealthy elites.”

Creating a Marshall Plan for the world may seem utopian, but in a strange way it may be the most practical and reasonable idea to deal with the grave crises we face today. In the words of the title of a book by Buckminster Fuller, we confront *Utopia or Oblivion*. We can continue on the present path, based on greed, nationalism, domination, hatred, and bigotry, with increasingly worsening economic, ecological, and social conditions, or we can strive for a more generous, tolerant, just, peaceful, humane, and environmentally sustainable world. The choice between a far better future and a far worse future is in our hands, and the stakes are very great, so we must not fail.

Even if we never accomplish a complete Marshall Plan for the planet, we should explore ways in which the U.S. and other governments, along with millions of individuals joining together in Non-Governmental Organizations, can significantly increase economic and humanitarian aid in specific areas of need, and make it more effective long-term. Imagine, for example, what the effect might be if the U.S. and Israel were to include, as part of a plan to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, an offer to devote a percentage of the money now spent on maintaining the occupation toward rebuilding the economy of Gaza. This would bring much more stability, cooperation, and unity than would increasing spending on blockades, weapons and defense.

## **Preventing “Climate Wars”**

Another threat to the national security of the U.S. and other nations that is becoming an increasing concern is what Gwynne Dyer, the award-winning veteran Canadian military scholar and journalist (and others) are calling “climate wars.” Dyer’s recent book, radio series and lectures on “climate wars” (most of these are available free online) provide a very frightening glimpse of a future world in which climate change

causes major heat waves, droughts, severe storms, flooding from rising seas and storm surges, wild fires, and other problems, resulting in waves of climate refugees, failed states, and potential warfare.

A report commissioned by the U.S.-financed Center for Naval Analyses, written by eleven retired U.S. generals and admirals, states that, “On the simplest level, [climate change] has the potential to create sustained natural and humanitarian disasters on a scale far beyond those we see today.” The panel of military experts, including retired General Anthony Zinni, former commander of U.S. forces in the Middle East, sees global warming as “a threat multiplier for instability in some of the most volatile regions of the world,” which could “seriously exacerbate already marginal living standards in many Asian, African, and Middle Eastern nations, causing widespread political instability and the likelihood of failed states.”

Admiral T. Joseph Lopez, former commander-in-chief of U.S. Naval Forces in Europe and of Allied Forces in Southern Europe, agreed that climate change could contribute to “the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit”, thereby making dangerous situations potentially worse. A report by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) in June 2007 concluded that genocidal conflicts in the Sudan (including Darfur) are related to global warming, especially as it increases the drought conditions that have led to famine. It suggests that this crisis may be replicated in much of North Africa and the Middle East. UNEP Executive Director Achim Steiner argues that there is an “inescapable linkage” between environmental degradation and social conditions.

## **Climate change and world hunger**

In Hebrew, the words for bread (*lechem*) and war (*milchamah*) share the same root. The Jewish sages used this linguistic connection to suggest that a lack of food, water, and other necessities can lead to instability and war. There are already many examples of climate change’s effects on hunger worldwide:

- In Pakistan, over ten million people were left in desperate need of food aid in 2010 after massive, devastating floods inundated farmland and destroyed crops.
- In Russia, droughts and severe heat waves in the summer of 2010 caused almost 40 percent of the wheat crop to be lost, and wheat prices soared in some regions, increasing the number of struggling families.
- In Kenya and Somalia, the lack of rain has resulted in several recent failed harvests and widespread hunger.
- The severe drought and heat waves in Israel reduced the quality of fruits and vegetables and sharply increased their prices in the fall of 2010.

According to the World Food Programme, climate change is expected to increase the number of hungry people by 10-20 percent by 2050. Military and intelligence strategists in many countries are revising their planning to take climate change effects into account. The Pentagon states that global warming is a larger threat than terrorism. "Picture Japan, suffering from flooding along its coastal cities and contamination of its fresh water supply, eyeing Russia's Sakhalin Island oil and gas reserves as an energy source," suggests a Pentagon memo on global warming. "Envision Pakistan, India and China — all armed with nuclear weapons — skirmishing at their borders over refugees, access to shared river and arable land."

Shrinking ice packs in the Asian Himalayas, European Alps, Peruvian Quelccaya (the largest ice cap in the tropics), and California Sierras, along with changes in the thermohaline circulation system (ocean conveyor belt), could have dramatic and devastating impacts. The U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, has said that *climate change needs to be considered as seriously as war* and, further, that "changes in our environment and the resulting upheavals from droughts to inundated coastal areas to loss of arable land are likely to become a major driver of war and conflict." Therefore, trying to reduce climate change may be one way to prevent future wars, while simultaneously

increasing energy security.<sup>8</sup>

## **Denial will not solve these problems**

However, largely due to the major disinformation campaigns by the oil, coal, and other industries that are gaining greatly from the status quo (as brilliantly discussed in *Climate Cover-Up* by James Hoggan), many people do not regard climate change as a threat or accept that human activities are a significant factor. In 2010, the Republican-controlled House Energy Committee voted three times to deny the reality of global warming.

Many Jews, especially in the Orthodox community, are in denial about climate change. Instead of considering the major scientific consensus as indicated by the many peer-reviewed articles and the consensus of scientific academies worldwide, they are more influenced by the views of *Fox News* and other conservative media sources. Most Jews and others, as we will discuss in Chapter 12, seldom even consider the major impact of animal-based agriculture on climate change.

When I try to stress the urgency of actions to combat climate change, including the importance of dietary changes to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, in my synagogue, I am often told that I should be more concerned about terrorism, Iran, and Israel's security. Of course, these are critical concerns, and they have been discussed previously in this book. But finding a way to avert the impending unprecedented climate catastrophe that many climate scientists are warning us is coming, along with its potential consequences of instability, terrorism, and war, must also become a societal imperative, and Jews should be playing a leading role in increasing awareness.

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### **Notes for chapter 9**

<sup>1</sup> February 7, 2005 *Haaretz* article, "U.S. poll: Synagogue-goers more likely to be politically conservative,"

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/536788.html>

<sup>2</sup> "Study on a Possible Israeli Strike on Iran's Nuclear Development Facilities," Abdullah Toukan and Anthony H. Cordesman, Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 14, 2009.

[http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090316\\_israelistrikeiran.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/090316_israelistrikeiran.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> “They hate us for our occupations,” Glenn Greenwald, *Solon* magazine, <http://www.readersupportednews.org/off-site-opinion-section/56-56/3699-they-hate-us-for-our-occupations>

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Common Sense* (November, 1935), *American Empire*, MacMillan Co., New York, 1970, p.150.

<sup>6</sup> “Wikileaks, Dr. King, and ‘War Psychosis,’” Be Scofield, *Tikkun Daily*, <http://www.tikkun.org/tikkundaily/2010/12/06/wikileaks-dr-king-and-war-psychosis/>

<sup>7</sup> “The Global Marshall Plan,” Network of Spiritual Progressives, [http://www.spiritualprogressives.org/article.php/gmp\\_one](http://www.spiritualprogressives.org/article.php/gmp_one)

<sup>8</sup> A Warmer world is ripe for conflict and danger,” David Cameron, *Financial Times*, January 24, 2007, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/49bca770-ab4f-11db-b5db-0000779e2340.html - axzz1diYsAjgu>



August 2011: Israelis in Haifa create a “tent city” to protest rising housing costs. Similar protests took place with the “Occupy Wall Street” movement that spread across the USA. Worldwide, people are increasingly angered at the inequitable distribution of the world’s resources.



## Chapter 10

### Should Jews be environmental activists?

*And the Lord God took the man [Adam] and put him into the Garden of Eden to work it and to guard it.*

—Genesis 2:15

*The earth was not created as a gift to you. You have been given to the earth, to treat it with respectful consideration, as God's earth, and everything on it [must be seen] as God's creation, and [animals recognized as] your fellow creatures — to be respected, loved, and helped to attain their purpose according to God's will...*

—Rabbi

Samson Raphael Hirsch<sup>1</sup>

The world is approaching an unprecedented climate catastrophe and is also severely threatened by many other environmental problems. Yet in spite of Judaism's many powerful teachings on environmental stewardship, the Jewish community (along with most other communities) is not adequately responding to today's environmental crises. This failure of the Jewish community to sufficiently address these environmental threats is one major reason that I believe my religion — our religion — has been stolen.

While there are a number of Jewish groups — including the under funded, under-supported Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) and Canfei

Nesharim, an Orthodox Jewish environmental group, which work diligently on environmental issues — the Jewish community as a whole is far from seriously involved. It is urgent that Jews play our historic role to be a “light unto the nations” and apply our eternal teachings in response to the many environmental threats that face our planet in this generation.

### **What must God think when observing current environmental conditions?**

When God created the world, God was able to say, “It is very good” (Genesis 1:31). Everything was in harmony as God had planned: the waters were clean, and the air was pure, the animals and humans lived in harmony. But what must God think about the world today? How must God look upon our beleaguered and contaminated planet when:

- The rain God provided to nourish our crops becomes acid rain, darkened by the many pollutants spewed into the air by smokestacks and tailpipes;
- The endless diversity of species of plants and animals that God created are becoming extinct at an alarming rate in tropical rainforests and other threatened habitats, before we have even been able to study and catalog most of them;
- The abundant fertile soil God provided is quickly being depleted and eroded; when the climatic conditions that God designed to meet our needs are threatened by global warming?

### **Our Modern “Ten Plagues”**

Today’s environmental threats bring to mind the Biblical Ten plagues in the book of Exodus. Is it only coincidence that we read this story in the synagogue during the weeks leading up to the environmental holiday of Tu B’Shevat? Or is God giving us a warning here? The list of today’s Ten Plagues might include:

- 1. The rapid melting (due to global warming) of polar ice**

**caps and sheets**, of permafrost and mountain glaciers, which could soon precipitate a disastrously sudden — for humans and other creatures — recalibration of the earth's climate. We are in the process creating a potential catastrophe comparable to the biblical Flood.

**2. A permanent increase both in severe droughts** (due to the drying effect of heat where water is scarce) and severe floods (due to the evaporative effect where water is plentiful), straining humanity to the limits of our ability to cope and survive.

**3. Extreme deforestation** (about half of the world's rainforests have already been destroyed), decimating one of the world's most valuable providers of natural goods and services and, by slashing the planet's ability to sequester carbon, further exacerbating climate change and all its consequences.

**4. Severe heat waves**, with each of the last five decades being warmer than the previous one and record temperatures being recorded in many areas.

**5. Rapid loss of thousands of species**, faster than during any previous time in history.

**6. Widespread soil erosion and nutrient depletion**, reducing fertility, increasing desertification, and severely compromising humanity's ability to feed itself.

**7. The serious pollution and, in some cases, “killing” of fresh water bodies** by runoff contaminated with pesticides, inorganic fertilizers, and animal wastes from factory farms, as well as by fallout from smokestack and tailpipe air pollution.

**8. An epidemic of heart disease**, many types of cancer, and other chronic degenerative diseases, largely due to gluttonous consumption of animal products and junk foods, sedentary lifestyles, and a glut of toxic environmental chemicals.

**9. Increasingly widespread and severe wildfires** because of warmer temperatures and the resultant dryer environment in many areas.

**10. Increasing hunger and famine** as global demand for food increases due to rising population, increased affluence leading to rising demand for animal products, and increasing use of biofuels, along with decreased food production due to shrinking glaciers and aquifers, droughts, floods, heat waves, and other damaging effects of climate change, and the loss of farm land to urban sprawl.

While the Egyptians in the time of Moses were subjected to only one plague at a time, the modern plagues threaten us all at once. The Jews in Goshen were spared most of the biblical plagues, while every person on earth is imperiled by these modern plagues. And it is we ourselves who are the authors of these plagues, though it is future generations who will be most severely afflicted.

Instead of an ancient Pharaoh's heart being hardened, our own hearts today have been hardened by the greed, materialism, waste, and lack of recognition of our precarious relationship with nature that are at the root of the current environmental threats.

God provided the Biblical plagues to free the Israelites from oppression. Had Pharaoh heeded the warning of the first plague, and simply let the people go, there would have been no need for the other nine plagues. Unfortunately, he did not. Today we must learn from this lesson, and heed many environmental warnings. *We must apply God's teachings* in order to save humanity and our precious but endangered planet, before we are destroyed because of our own hard-heartedness.

### **Jewish teachings on the environment**

Let us consider some of Judaism's powerful teachings about how we should be treating the environment.

Some Jews (as well as members of other biblically-based religions) argue that humankind has been given a license to exploit the earth and its creatures, because God gave us "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creeps upon the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

However, the Talmudic sages interpret that "dominion" as

one of *guardianship or stewardship*, serving as co-workers with God in caring for and improving the world, and *not* as a right to conquer and exploit animals and the earth (*Shabbat* 10a; *Sanhedrin* 7). The fact that people's dominion over animals is a limited one is indicated by God's first (and completely vegan) dietary regime in Genesis 1:29, and also the statement in Genesis 2:15 that humans are to till the earth and *guard it*, which charges us with responsibility for the land and all the creatures on it.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel, stated that "dominion" does not mean the arbitrary power of a tyrannical ruler who whimsically and cruelly governs in order to satisfy his personal desires.<sup>2</sup> He observes that such a repulsive form of servitude could not be forever sealed in the world of God, whose "tender mercies are over all His work" (Psalm 145:9).<sup>3</sup>

### **Jews are to be co-workers with God in preserving the environment**

The Talmudic sages assert that the assigned role of the Jewish people is to enhance the world as partners of God in the work of creation. [*Shabbat* 10a; *Sanhedrin* 7] The following verses from Psalms reinforce this concept:

When I look at Your heavens, the work of Your hands,  
The moon and work that you have established,  
What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son  
of man that You do care for him?  
Yet you have made him little less than the angels and  
do crown him with glory and honor.  
You have given him dominion over the works of Your  
hands;  
You have put all things under his feet...  
(Psalms 8:4-7)

The Talmudic sages express great concern about preserving the environment and preventing pollution. They state three clear principles that can still be applied today:

- "It is forbidden to live in a town which has no garden or

greenery.” (*Mishnah Kiddushin* 4: 12; *Kiddushin* 66d)

- Threshing floors must be placed far enough from a town so that it will not be dirtied by chaff carried by winds. (*Mishnah Baba Batra* 2:8)
- Tanneries must be kept at least 50 cubits (a cubit is about half a meter or 20 inches) from a town and may be placed only on the east side of a town, so that odors and pollution will be carried away from the town by the prevailing winds from the west. (*Mishnah Baba Batra* 2:8, 9)

These three specific rules lead to a general principle that industries should be regulated in such a way that they do not spoil the environment. Dust and air pollution must be controlled, and green spaces” must be provided for the health and enjoyment of the people and animals living there.

## **The earth is the Lord’s**

Judaism asserts that there is one God who created the entire earth as a unity, in ecological balance; that everything is connected to everything else; and, in turn, everything is connected to --and belongs -- to the One God. These lines from Psalm 104 perhaps best express this idea:

...You [God] are the One Who sends forth springs into  
    brooks, that they may run between mountains,  
To give drink to every animal of the fields, the  
    creatures of the forest quench their thirst.  
Beside them dwell the fowl of the heavens...  
You water the mountains from Your upper chambers...  
You cause the grass to spring up for the cattle, and  
    herb, for the service of humans, to bring forth  
    bread from the earth...  
How manifold are your works, O Lord! In wisdom  
    You have made them all; the earth is full of Your  
    property...

However, there is an apparent contradiction between two other verses in Psalms: “The earth is the Lord’s” (Psalms 24:1)

and “The heavens are the heavens of God, but the earth God has given to human beings” (Psalms 115:16). Our sages reconcile this apparent discrepancy in the following way: Before a person says a *bracha* (a blessing), before one acknowledges God’s ownership of the land and its products, then “the earth is the Lord’s.” After a person has said a *bracha*, acknowledging God’s ownership and that we are stewards assigned to ensure that God’s works are properly used and shared, *then* “the earth He has given to human beings.” (*Mishnah Berachot* 30:5)

Property is a sacred trust given by God; it must be used to fulfill God’s purposes. No person has absolute or exclusive control over his or her possessions. The concept that people have custodial care of the earth, as opposed to ownership, is illustrated by this ancient Jewish story:

Two men were fighting over a piece of land. Each claimed ownership and bolstered his claim with apparent proof. To resolve their differences, they agreed to put the case before a rabbi. The rabbi listened but could come to no decision because both seemed to be right. Finally he said, “Since I cannot decide to whom this land belongs, let us ask the land.” He put his ear to the ground and, after a moment, straightened up. “Gentlemen, the land says it belongs to neither of you, but that *you* belong to *it*.”<sup>4</sup>

Even the produce of the field does not belong solely to the person who farms the land. The poor are entitled to a portion:

And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corner of your field, neither shall you gather the gleaning of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, neither shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and for the stranger; I am the Lord, your God. (Leviticus 19: 9 -10)

These portions set aside for the poor were not voluntary contributions based on kindness. They were, in essence, a regular Divine assessment. Because God is the real Owner of the land, God claims a share of the bounty that God has

provided, which is to be left for the poor.

As a reminder that “the earth is the Lord’s,” the land must be permitted to rest and lie fallow every seven years (the Sabbatical year):

Six years you shall sow your land, and gather in the increase thereof, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lay fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the animals of the field shall eat. In like manner you shall deal with your vineyard, and with your olive yard. (Exodus 23: 10, 11)

The Sabbatical year also has ecological benefits. The land is given a chance to rest and renew its fertility.

### **Jews are not to waste or unnecessarily destroy anything of value**

This prohibition against wanton destruction or wastage of any useful resource that God has given us, called *bal tashchit*<sup>5</sup> (“you shall not destroy”) in Jewish law, is based on the following Torah statement:

When you besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, you shall not destroy (*lo tashchit*) the trees thereof by wielding an ax against them; for you may eat of them. You shall not cut them down; for is the tree of the field a human being, that it should be besieged by you? Only the trees of which you know that they are not trees for food, those you may destroy and cut down, that you may build bulwarks against the city that makes war with you, until it falls. (Deuteronomy 20:19,20 )

This Torah prohibition is very specific. Taken in its most literal sense, it prohibits only the destruction of fruit trees during wartime. However, the Talmudic sages and the Jewish Oral Tradition greatly expanded the types of objects, methods of destruction, and situations covered by *bal tashchit*:

Whoever breaks vessels, or tears garments, or destroys



a building, or clogs a well, or does away with food in a destructive manner violates the prohibition of *bal tashchit*. (*Kiddushin* 32a)

Later rabbinic rulings extended the prohibition of waste or destruction to everything of potential use, whether created by God or altered by people. (*Sefer Ha-Chinukh*, # 530) Talmudic rulings on *bal tashchit* also prohibit the unnecessary killing of animals (*Hullin* 7b) and the eating of extravagant foods when one can be nourished and satisfied by simpler ones. (*Shabbat* 140b) In other words, *bal tashchit* prohibits the destruction, complete or incomplete, direct or indirect, of all things that are of potential benefit to people and the world.

The following Talmudic statements illustrate the seriousness with which the rabbis considered the violation of *bal tashchit*:

- The sage Rabbi Hanina attributed the early death of his son to the fact that the boy had unnecessarily chopped down a fig tree. (*Baba Kamma* 91b)
- Jews should be taught when very young that it is a sin to waste even small amounts of food. (*Berachot* 52b)
- Rav Zutra taught: “One who covers an oil lamp or uncovers a naphtha lamp transgresses the prohibition of *bal tashchit*” (*Shabbat* 67b) [Both actions mentioned would cause a faster (hence wasteful) consumption of the fuel.]

Maimonides spells out these specific details:

It is forbidden to cut down fruit-bearing trees outside a besieged city, nor may a water channel be deflected from them so that they wither... Not only one who cuts down trees, but also one who smashes household goods, tears clothes, demolishes a building, stops up a spring, or destroys articles of food with destructive intent transgresses the command “you must not destroy.” (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings and Wars 6:8,10)

The *Sefer Ha-Chinukh*, a thirteenth century text which discusses the 613 *mitzvot* (commandments) in detail, indicates that the underlying purpose of *bal tashchit* is to help one to learn to act like the righteous, who are repelled by and meticulously avoid all waste and destruction:

The purpose of this mitzvah [*bal tashchit*] is to teach us to love that which is good and worthwhile and to cling to it, so that good becomes a part of us and we avoid all that is evil and destructive. This is the way of the righteous and those who improve society, who love peace and rejoice in the good in people and bring them close to Torah: that nothing, not even a mustard seed, should be lost to the world, that they should regret any loss or destruction that they see, and if possible they will prevent any destruction that they can. Not so are the wicked, who are like demons, who rejoice in destruction of the world, and they destroy themselves. (*Sefer Ha-Chinukh*, #529)

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the leading Orthodox rabbi of nineteenth century Germany, viewed *bal tashchit* as the most basic Jewish principle of all: to acknowledge the sovereignty of God and the limitations on our own will and ego. When we preserve the world around us, we act with the understanding that God owns everything. However, when we destroy, we are, in effect, worshipping the idols of our own desires, living only for self-gratification without keeping God in mind. By observing *bal tashchit*, we restore our harmony not only with the world around us, but also with God's will, which we place before our own. Rabbi Hirsch stated:

“Do not destroy anything” is the first and most general call of God... If you should now raise your hand to play a childish game, to indulge in senseless rage, wishing to destroy that which you should only use, wishing to exterminate that which you should only gain advantage from, if you should regard the beings beneath you as objects without rights, not perceiving God Who created them, and therefore desire that they feel the might of your presumptuous mood, instead of

using them only as the means of wise human activity — then God’s call proclaims to you, “Do not destroy anything! Be a *mensch* [good human being]! Only if you use the things around you for wise human purposes, sanctified by the word of My teaching, only then are you a *mensch* and have the right over them that I have given you as a human. However, if you destroy, if you ruin, at that moment you are not a human... and have no right to the things around you. I lent them to you for wise use only; never forget that I lent them to you. As soon as you use them unwisely, be it the greatest or the smallest, you commit treachery against My world, you commit murder and robbery against My property, you sin against Me!” This is what God calls unto you, and with this call does God represent the greatest and the smallest against you and grants the smallest as well as the greatest a right against your presumptuousness... In truth, there is no one nearer to idolatry than one who can disregard the fact that all things are the creatures and property of God, and who then presumes also to have the right, because he has the might, to destroy them according to a presumptuous act of will.<sup>6</sup>

Rabbi Hirsch also teaches that “destruction” includes using more things (or things of greater value) than is necessary to obtain one’s aim.<sup>7</sup> The following *Midrash* is related to this concept:

Two men entered a shop. One ate coarse bread and vegetables, while the other ate fine bread, fat meat, and drank old wine. The one who ate fine food suffered harm, while the one who had coarse food escaped harm. Observe how simply animals live and how healthy they are as a result. (*Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 1:18)

### **Is human action responsible for climate change?**

Our planet, according to most professional climate scientists, is rapidly approaching an unprecedented climate catastrophe. There is an overwhelming consensus among

climate experts, as well as scientists in many other fields, that modern climate change is real, that it poses a major threat to humanity, and that human activities are the primary cause.

A letter published in the May 7, 2010 issue of the leading journal *Science*, signed by 255 leading scientists who are members of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences (USNAS), including 11 Nobel laureates, states, “There is compelling, comprehensive, and consistent objective evidence that humans are changing the climate in ways that threaten our societies and the ecosystems on which we depend.” The lead signer, Pacific Institute President Peter Gleick, observed, “It is hard to get 255 members of the [USNAS] to agree on pretty much anything, making the import of this letter even more substantial.”

The joint science academies’ statement in 2005 “Global Response to Climate Change” was signed by leaders of the science academies of Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, Holland, India, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. It urged the world’s governments to “acknowledge that the threat of climate change is real and increasing” and to “take prompt action to reduce the causes of climate change, adapt to its impacts and ensure that the issue is included in all relevant national and international strategies.”

The annual “State of the Climate” report of the Australian Bureau of Meteorology issued in July 2010 used an in-depth analysis of 10 climate indicators that all pointed to a significant warming during the past three decades and concluded that “global warming is undeniable,” and that it is rapidly accelerating.

The 2007 Fourth Assessment Report (AR4) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established by the United Nations Environmental Programme and the World Meteorological Organization, declares that there is a greater than a 90 percent certainty that emissions of heat-trapping gases from human activities have caused “most of the observed increase in globally averaged temperatures since the mid-20th century.” The AR4 is the most comprehensive synthesis of climate change science to date. Experts from more than 130 countries contributed to this assessment, which represents six years of work. More than 450 lead authors received input from more than 800 contributing authors, and an additional 2,500 experts reviewed the draft documents.

## **Increasingly, climate change is about verifiable facts on the ground and not just predictions**

Almost weekly there are reports of severe droughts, heat waves, storms, flooding, wildfires, and unprecedented melting of polar icecaps and glaciers. Climate scientists consider all of these to be symptoms of a climate that is becoming more extreme and chaotic due to a warming planet:

- The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was the warmest since scientists began keeping global temperature records in 1880.
- In 2010, every month from January through June had global land and ocean surface temperatures warmer than in any previous corresponding month since the earliest records.
- The year 2010 had the most “warmest months” in any recorded calendar year, and that year tied 2005 as the warmest year in recorded history.
- Despite the fact that many areas are suffering from severe droughts, 2010 was also the wettest year in history, with floods of almost biblical proportions in Pakistan and Australia.
- All of the Earth’s nine warmest years since 1880 have occurred between 2001 and 2010. The U.S. experienced the second warmest summer on record in 2011, a summer that also saw continued record-breaking drought across the southern U.S. and major floods in several states due to Hurricane Irene.

While not all changing weather patterns can be attributed to global warming, most are consistent with projections for a warmer world. Since all of these events have occurred with an average planetary temperature increase of slightly more than 1 degree Fahrenheit in the past 100 years, it is very alarming that global climate scientists, including those with the Nobel Prize-winning IPCC, are projecting an increase of from 2 to 11 degrees Fahrenheit in the next 100 years if we continue on our

present course of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. If this increase is more than 4 degrees Fahrenheit — a change that is increasingly likely as atmospheric GHG levels keep rising — there is a consensus among climate scientists, biologists, and social scientists that this would have devastating effects on humanity and on the current balance of life on the planet, with many additional severe droughts, storms, floods, wildfires, and other extreme weather events.

Many climate experts, including James Hansen, director of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Goddard Institute for Space Studies, believe that a safe threshold value for carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is 350 parts per million (ppm). We are already at 390 ppm and growing by at least 2 ppm per year — yet another indication that major changes in human behavior must be made very soon.

What worries Hansen and other climate scientists most is the prospect that climate change could reach a tipping point within just a few years, unleashing a vicious cycle of rapid climate alterations leading to disastrous consequences — melted ice caps, flooded cities, mass species extinctions and spreading deserts, among other events — unless humanity soon begins to use energy far more effectively.

Scientists at the February 2009 annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science agreed that climate change will likely increase more rapidly than expected, because atmospheric carbon has increased faster than recent predictions. Those increased temperatures are, in turn, setting off “positive feedback” (self-reinforcing) loops in global ecosystems.

For example, when incoming sunlight strikes Arctic ice, up to 70 percent is reflected back into space. But once the ice has melted, only about 6 percent is reflected and about 94 percent is absorbed by the dark soil or water and converted into heat. The more ice that melts, the more heat is absorbed, creating a vicious cycle (positive feedback loop) that accelerates the melting of the Arctic Sea ice cover, effectively destroying one of the planet's major “ice boxes.” Another example of a positive feedback loop is that as temperatures increase, more air conditioning is used. This means more fossil fuels are burned, resulting in more greenhouse gas emissions, and thus more warming. Which leads back to more air conditioning... and the

vicious cycle continues.

Gwynne Dyer, the award-winning veteran Canadian military scholar, journalist and author of *Climate Wars*, provides a very frightening glimpse of a future world in which climate change will cause major heat waves, droughts, severe storms, flooding from rising seas and storm surges, wildfires and other problems. The upheavals caused by these events could result in waves of climate refugees, failed states, and potential warfare. A 2007 report by 11 retired U.S. generals and admirals comes to a similar conclusion, stating that hungry, thirsty, desperate refugees fleeing the effects of climate change could make instability, violence, terrorism, and war more likely. Military and intelligence strategists in many countries are revising their planning to take climate change effects into account.

## **Why is there so much skepticism about climate change?**

With all of this powerful scientific evidence confirming anthropogenic (human-caused) climate change, why there is so much public skepticism? In 2009, only 57 percent of Americans accepted that climate change was a problem and only 36 percent thought human activities were a factor. Is this merely denial, or are there more sinister reasons?

According to James Hoggan, author of *Climate Cover-Up: The Crusade To Deny Global Warming*, the oil, coal, and other industries that are profiting from the status quo are willing to go to great lengths to mislead people so that they can continue to receive huge profits. Hoggan, who was initially a skeptic about climate change himself, writes that it is a “story of betrayal, a story of selfishness, greed, and irresponsibility on an epic scale... a story of deceit, of poisoning public judgment...”

Another clue comes from the results of a study called, “Balance as Bias,” which considered a random sample of 636 articles about climate change in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. More than 50 percent of the articles gave roughly equal weight to both the scientific view and the scientifically discredited view (that humans do not play a major role in climate change). This would be similar to having a debate on the shape of our planet, and giving equal time to the Flat Earth Society.

In addition, some conservative politicians and commentators downplay the significance of climate change. U. S. Senator James Inhofe, for example, calls it the “greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people.” No wonder many folks are so confused. On one side you have vociferously opinionated media pundits, bloggers, and politicians like Senator Inhofe (who received close to a million dollars from the oil and coal industries between 2000 and 2008). On the other side are the real experts, typically more cautious in their assertions.

Meanwhile, the media, leaning over backward to be perceived as balanced and reasonable, often gives equal time to



both “sides” of the issue — even though the vast majority of climate scientists, virtually all peer-reviewed articles in respected scientific journals, and statements from scientific academies worldwide agree that the scientific probability is extremely high that climate change poses an existential threat to life as we know it — and that we are the cause *and* the potential solution.

### **Waiting for 100% agreement means doing nothing**

Many people do not understand that scientists rarely, if ever, all agree 100% on anything. As pointed out with the “Flat Earth Society” example above, there will always be a few fringe dissenters, even on commonly accepted facts. Nor do people always understand that in science, a “theory” is not merely somebody’s made-up opinion. Rather, it is *a hypothesis that is supported by documentable evidence*. The confusion over what scientific “probability” and “uncertainty” actually mean was addressed in a letter signed by 255 leading scientists that appeared in the May 2010 issue of the respected journal *Science*:

We are deeply disturbed by the recent escalation of political assaults on scientists in general and on climate scientists in particular. All citizens should understand some basic scientific facts. There is always some uncertainty associated with scientific conclusions; science never absolutely proves anything. *When someone says that society should wait until scientists are absolutely certain before taking any action, it is the same as saying society should never take action.* [Emphasis in original] For a problem as potentially catastrophic as climate change, taking no action poses a dangerous risk for our planet.

Climate expert Lord Nicholas Stern of Brentford, former chief economist at the World Bank and former advisor to the British Prime Minister on economic matters, concluded in a major study of the potential economic effects of climate change that spending one percent of gross national product now to reduce climate change could

prevent the necessity of spending five to 20 percent of gross national product later on to address the many harmful effects of climate change.

If we follow the strenuous recommendations of climate scientists, we have the potential for a far better, environmentally sustainable world. However, if we follow the advice of the skeptics and do not try to address climate change soon, we will likely end up with a climatic cataclysm.

### **Is climate change merely “liberal politics?”**

Another reason there is so much skepticism about climate change, despite the strong scientific consensus surrounding it, is the bias of *Fox News*. An internal e-mail written in December 2009 and published by liberal-media-watchdog group Media Matters for America, on December 16, 2010, revealed that Bill Sammon, *Fox News*'s Washington bureau chief, told *Fox* journalists to “refrain from asserting that the planet has warmed (or cooled) in any given period without IMMEDIATELY pointing out that such theories are based upon data that critics have called into question. It is not our place as journalists to assert such notions as facts, especially as this debate intensifies.”

While it is true that there have been a few examples of scientific error and misbehavior among climate scientists, these have been unfairly seized upon and exaggerated by climate change deniers. Follow-up investigations have demonstrated that the mistakes were honest ones, and there were no efforts by the scientific community to mislead the public.

The so-called “Climategate” scandal has been shown to be a bogus accusation. Numerous investigations of the scientists in question concluded they were guilty of nothing more than failing to fully share their data with their critics and of making rude e-mail comments about them. Investigations were carried out by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Inspector General, by the British House of Commons' Science and Technology Committee, and by an independent inquiry panel convened by the British University of East Anglia, among others. An Associated Press review of the e-mails in question found no evidence that the scientists in question faked anything.

Many people dismiss climate change as just “liberal politics.” They give more weight to the views of Glenn Beck, Rush Limbaugh, and other reactionary commentators than to the scientific consensus. These climate deniers should be made aware of the previously mentioned, little-known group, “Republicans for Environmental Protection (REP).” There is an abundance of material about climate change and other environmental threats at their website (<http://www.rep.org/>), including responses to many of the questions that climate deniers (and sincere skeptics) raise.

While REP is very committed to the election of Republicans, they were only able to endorse 19 out of over 500 Republican candidates (less than 4 percent!) for Congress and governorships during the 2010 midterm U.S. Elections, because so few of these candidates have positive records on the environment.

Both REP and a sister group called ConservAmerica (at <http://www.conservamerica.org/>) share the slogan “Conservation IS Conservative.” These groups deserve much greater recognition and their voices heard. Climate change is not a partisan, political issue, but arguably the greatest moral, environmental, economic, and social justice issue of our time.

## **Climate change and other environmental threats to Israel**

Traditionally, preserving the Land of Israel has been considered a vital mitzvah. Jews who love Israel should recognize that Israel is already suffering from the effects of climate change and from other environmental crises.

These problems are just as much a threat to Israel’s survival as is terrorism — maybe even more so, because even if peace and relative harmony were to reign, the environmental threats would still exist and steadily increase. Far more people die from air pollution in Israel than from terrorism and traffic accidents combined.

On Pesach and Sukkot, Jews pray for dew and rain “in their proper time” so that there will be abundant harvests in Israel. But are prayers enough? In the past seven years, Israelis have been experiencing a severe drought. In 2010, Israel faced the worst heat wave in the 26 years that records have been kept:

- The drought has now reached catastrophic proportions, people are paying much, much more for their water – and the supplies are very limited.
- The drought and heat waves were so severe in 2010 that the amount and quality of Israel's fruits and vegetables were greatly degraded, while at the same time, prices skyrocketed.
- On December 2, 2010, largely because of the very hot, dry conditions, Israel experienced the worst wildfire in her history in the Galilee area near Haifa.
- In November 2010, the Israeli chief rabbinate twice declared fast days, and special prayers for rain and Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious leaders joined in prayers for rain.

Although Israel did have several significant rainfalls in the winters of 2009-2010 and 2010-2011, the total precipitation was still below average for each period. The ongoing drought has left water levels far below normal after 5 consecutive years of significantly reduced precipitation. In 2009, the water level in the Sea of Galilee, Israel's main source of water, was so low that water could not be pumped out of it. Other fresh-water aquifers are threatened with salt contamination entering as their water levels decrease.

Prospects for Israel's environmental future are grim. The Israel Union for Environmental Defense (IUED, or in Hebrew *Adam, Teva v'Din*) projected in 2007 that continued global warming will cause Israel to suffer many additional severe heat waves, with an average temperature increase of from two to 11 degrees Fahrenheit and a 20 to 30 percent decrease in average precipitation. When rain does come, it will often be in the form of severe storms. The IUED also warns that climate change causing major floods could cause an inundation of the coastal plain (where most Israelis live) by a rising Mediterranean Sea. Where would all those displaced people go in Israel, a very small nation that is already one of the world's most densely populated countries, especially in urban areas?

Israel also has other serious environmental problems. Most Israeli rivers are already badly polluted. There is a shortage of open space. Less than 10 percent of Israel's garbage is recycled. The flow in the Jordan River is less than a tenth of its normal flow, and most of it is sewage as it enters the Dead Sea. Since the Jordan River is the main source of replenishment for the Dead Sea, this famous body of water is also very polluted. Due to the decreasing amount of water entering it, the Dead Sea is also rapidly shrinking, with resulting sink holes that threaten the tourist industry in the area. These and other Israeli environmental problems are not being adequately addressed, largely because so much attention and resources must be devoted to security concerns.

### **The call of the hour**

There is a need for major changes if the world is to avoid increasingly severe threats from climate change and other environmental problems. As long ago as 1992, over 1,670 scientists, including 104 Nobel laureates — a majority of the living recipients of the Prizes in the sciences — signed a “World Scientists’ Warning To Humanity.”<sup>8</sup> The introduction states:

Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course. Human activities inflict harsh and often irreversible damage on the environment and on critical resources. If not checked, many of our current practices put at serious risk the future that we wish for human society and the plant and animal kingdoms, and may so alter the living world that it will be unable to sustain life in the manner that we know. Fundamental changes are urgent if we are to avoid the collision our present course will bring about.

The scientists’ analysis discusses threats to the atmosphere, rivers and streams, oceans, soil, living species, and forests. Their warning:

We the undersigned, senior members of the world’s scientific community, hereby warn all humanity of

what lies ahead. A great change in our stewardship of the earth and the life on it is required, if vast human misery is to be avoided and our global home on this planet is not to be irretrievably mutilated.

It is essential that the Jewish community apply our rich tradition concerning environmental responsibility and stewardship to the world's fragile ecology. Too often the Jewish establishment has been silent while our climate is rapidly changing, our air is bombarded by poisons that threaten life, our rivers and streams are polluted by industrial wastes, our fertile soil is eroded and depleted, and the ecological balance is endangered by the destruction of rain forests and other vital habitats.

The Jewish community must become more actively involved. We must proclaim that it is *chillul Hashem* (a desecration of God's name) to pollute the air and water which God created pure, to slash and burn forests which existed before there were human beings, and to wantonly destroy the abundant resources that God has so generously provided for all of humanity to enjoy and sustain itself from. We have a choice as indicated in the following Torah verse:

I call heaven and earth to witness concerning you this day, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse; therefore choose life, that you may live, you and your descendants. (Deuteronomy 30:19)

We *must* choose life!

The following *midrash* (rabbinic teaching) provides an early warning about the importance of preserving the environment:

In the hour when the Blessed Holy One [God]  
created the first human being [Adam],  
God took him and let him pass before  
all the trees of the Garden of Eden and said to him:  
"See my works, how fine and excellent they are!  
All that I have created, for you have I created them.

Think upon this and do not ruin and destroy My world,  
For if you ruin it, there is no one to set it right after you.”  
(*Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 7:28)

In ancient times, people may have wondered about the significance of this midrash. How could it be possible to destroy the world that God had made? Did anybody have such power? And what could it mean, that if they did ruin it, nobody could fix it again? Wouldn't God fix everything? Now, however, it has become all too relevant. We do indeed have the power to destroy the world.

Judaism offers very powerful teachings on our environmental obligations, and these teachings are urgently needed today. Applying them would not only help to revitalize Judaism, but could also help avert the many current threats to humanity.

(Additional suggestions for improving the environment are in Appendix C.)

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#### Notes for Chapter 10

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, *The Nineteen Letters*, Letter 4.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, *A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace*, Section 2; Also see J. Green, “Chalutzim of the Messiah —The Religious Vegetarian Concept as Expounded by Rabbi Kook,” (lecture given in Johannesburg, South Africa), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Jewish folk wisdom. Rabbi Shlomo Riskin in the “Biblical Ecology, A Jewish View” television documentary directed by Mitchell Chalek and Jonathan Rosen, also told this story.

<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Yonassan Gershom points out that this is also sometimes spelled *ba'al taschit*, a play on words meaning “master of destruction.” In the Hasidic community, he has heard parents tell children, “Don't be a *ba'al taschit*” when they break or destroy something. This interpretation has carried over onto the Internet, where both spellings are frequently found.

<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb*, Chapter 56, Sections 397, 398

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Union of Concerned Scientists at:

<http://www.ucsusa.org/resources/warning.html>

## *The Souls of a Million Children*



A polar bear clings to a remnant of melting ice in the Arctic Sea. As the ice caps grow smaller, bear habitat is shrinking rapidly. Many polar bears have drowned for lack of solid ice floes to climb on, and the species is threatened with extinction. Is this how God wants us to treat God's creatures?



## Chapter 11

### Should Jews be animal rights activists?

*There are probably no creatures that require more the protective Divine word against the presumption of man than the animals, which like man have sensations and instincts, but whose body and powers are nevertheless subservient to man. In relation to them man so easily forgets that injured animal muscle twitches just like human muscle, that the maltreated nerves of an animal sicken like human nerves, that the animal being is just as sensitive to cuts, blows, and beating as man. Thus man becomes the torturer of the animal soul.*

— Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch<sup>1</sup>

*Here you are faced with God's teaching, which obliges you not only to refrain from inflicting unnecessary pain on any animal, but also to help and, when you can, to lessen the pain whenever you see an animal suffering, even through no fault of yours.*

— Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch<sup>2</sup>

The quotations above are just two examples of Judaism's powerful teachings concerning the proper treatment of animals. Unfortunately, the Torah's magnificent teachings on compassion for animals are often overlooked in a world where

animals suffer enormously at the hands of humans. It is marvelous to have such beautiful teachings, but it would be even better if they were applied to reduce the current widespread mistreatment of animals.

## **The relationship between God and animals**

Judaism provides very powerful teachings about the proper treatment of animals. If Jews took these teachings seriously, we would be among the strongest protesters of many current practices related to animals.

The Torah teaches that animals are part of God's creation and that people bear special responsibilities toward them. The Jewish tradition clearly indicates that we are forbidden to be cruel to animals and that we are to treat them with compassion. These concepts are summarized in the Hebrew phrase *tsa'ar ba'alei chayim*, the Torah mandate not to cause "pain to living creatures," which the Talmud states is *d'oraita*, meaning a law that comes directly from the Torah (as opposed to one enacted by the rabbis later).<sup>3</sup>

Psalms 104 and 148 describe God's close identification with the animals of the field, the creatures of the sea, and the birds of the air. In the book of Genesis, we see the close connection between animals and people at the time of the Creation:

- Sea animals and birds receive the same blessing as people: "Be fruitful and multiply" (Genesis 1:22).
- Animals were initially given a vegetarian diet, similar to that of people (Genesis 1:29, 30).
- The important Hebrew term *nefesh chayah* (a "living being") is applied in Genesis (1:21, 24) to animals as well as people.<sup>4</sup>

Although the Torah clearly indicates that humans are to have "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that creeps upon the earth"

(Genesis 1:26), a cooperative and mutual relationship is intended (see chapter 10). The rights and privileges of animals are not to be neglected or overlooked. Animals are also God's creatures, possessing sensitivity and the capacity for feeling pain; hence they must be protected and treated with compassion and justice. God even made treaties and covenants with animals just as with humans:

“As for me,” says the Lord, “behold I establish My Covenant with you and with your seed after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the fowl, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that go out of the Ark, even every beast of the earth.” (Genesis 9:9-10)

And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field and with the fowls of heaven and with the creeping things of the ground. And I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the land and I will make them to lie down safely. (Hosea 2:20)

God includes animals, as well as people, when he admonishes Jonah: “and should I not have pity on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than 120,000 persons... and also much cattle?” (Jonah 4:11)

The Psalms portray God's concern for animals: “His tender mercies are over all His works” (Psalms 145:9). They picture God as “satisfying the desire of every living creature” (Psalms 145:16), “providing food for the animals and birds” (Psalms 147:9), and “preserving both man and beast” (Psalms 36:7).

God provides each animal with the attributes necessary for survival in its environment. For example, the camel has a short tail so that its tail won't become ensnared when it feeds upon thorns; the ox has a long tail so that it can protect itself from gnats when it feeds on the plains; the antennae of locusts are flexible so that they won't be blinded by their feelers breaking against trees.

## Jewish teachings on compassion for animals

Jews are supposed to imitate God's positive attributes and to be *rachmanim b'nai rachmanim*, "compassionate children of compassionate ancestors" (*Beitza 32b*). In Judaism, animals cannot be considered equal to human beings, but that does not mean that they have no right to be treated well. In fact, the Torah grants some specific rights to animals, which were later broadened in their application by the Talmudic rabbis.

Perhaps the Jewish attitude toward animals is best summarized by the statement in Proverbs 12:10, "The righteous person regards the life (*nefesh*) of his animal." This is the human counterpoint of "The Lord is good to all, and God's tender mercies are over all His works." (Psalms 145:9). In Judaism, one who is cruel to animals cannot be regarded as a righteous individual.

The Torah mandates numerous laws requiring compassion to animals, including:

- An ox is not to be muzzled when threshing the grain [so it does not suffer from being unable to eat food it sees and smells all day] (Deuteronomy 25:4).
- A farmer must not plow with an ox and an ass together [so that the weaker animal would not suffer pain in trying to keep up with the stronger one] (Deuteronomy 22:10).
- Animals, as well as people, must be allowed to rest on the Sabbath day (Exodus 20:10). The importance of this verse is indicated by its inclusion in the Ten Commandments and its recitation in Shabbat morning *Kiddush* blessing in many traditions.
- Based on the question of the angel of God to Balaam, "Why have you hit your donkey these three times?" (Numbers 22:32), the Talmud states that animals are to be treated humanely.
- Based on Deuteronomy 11:15, "And I will give grass in the

fields for your cattle and you shall eat and be satisfied,” the Talmud teaches that a person should not eat before first feeding his or her animals.

Many great Jewish heroes were chosen because they showed compassion to animals. Moses and King David were considered worthy to be leaders because of their kind treatment of the sheep in their care when they were shepherds (*Exodus Rabbah* 2:2). Rebecca was judged suitable to be Isaac’s wife because of her kindness in providing water to the ten thirsty camels cared for by Eliezer, Abraham’s servant (Genesis 24:14).

All of these teachings should lead us to care for the welfare of animals, and to raise our voices in protest when they are mistreated. Unfortunately, many Jews are not protesting, perhaps because they are not aware of the extreme cruelty involved in the modern meat, egg, and dairy industries.

With regard to the treatment of animals, I have long seen my role to be that of a bridge between people with two extreme, opposite viewpoints, each of which expresses only part of the overall picture. One group consists of religious Jews who are admirably meticulous in carrying out most *mitzvot* (commandments) but who overlook how grievously the *mitzvot* related to the proper treatment of animals are being violated on factory farms, as well as in laboratories, circuses, rodeos, and other settings. The other group is made up of sincerely dedicated animal rights activists who protest diligently against animal abuses, but who misrepresent religious teachings and often see religion as an enemy, rather than a potential ally in efforts to improve conditions for animals. In this chapter, I am attempting to bring these two sides together in respectful dialogue.

### **Some examples of the mistreatment of animals today on factory farms**

As we have seen, the Jewish tradition stresses compassion for animals and commands that we strive to avoid causing them pain (*tsa’ar ba’alei chayim*). Unfortunately, the conditions under which animals are raised for food today are quite

different from any that the Torah would endorse. Below are just a few examples of the mistreatment of animals on factory farms.<sup>5</sup>

**The raising of calves to produce veal typically involves great cruelty.** Almost immediately after birth, the owners take the calf from his mother, with no consideration of his need for motherly nourishment, affection, and physical contact. This is a violation of the biblical law that says a calf must remain with his or her mother for at least seven days (Leviticus 22:27). The farmer then locks the calf up for the rest of his life inside a wooden stall so narrow there isn't even enough room for him to turn around or lie down comfortably.

To obtain the pale, tender veal desired by consumers, the owners purposely keep the calf anemic by giving him a special high-calorie, iron-free diet. The calf craves iron so much that he would lick the iron fittings on his stall and his own urine if he could, but he is tied to the stall so that he can't turn his head. The stall is kept very warm and the calf is deprived of water, so that he will be forced to drink more of his high-calorie liquid diet. The very unnatural conditions of the veal calf's life — the lack of exercise, sunlight, fresh air, proper food and water, and social stimulation — make for a very sick, anemic animal. Antibiotics and drugs are used to try to keep the calf disease-free. The calf only leaves his stall when it is time for him to be trucked to slaughter; sometimes he drops dead from stress and exertion during that final trip.

**Chickens are raised for slaughter in long, windowless, crowded sheds,** unable to see sunlight, breathe fresh air or get any proper exercise. When the tiny chicks arrive there is plenty of room, but they have progressively less and less room as they grow and the shed gets too crowded for the birds to move properly. Just prior to slaughter, the area that each chicken has — about half a square foot on average — is barely enough for him to move. Overcrowding and stress mark the lives of these “broiler” (meat) chickens, and they are generally slaughtered when only about seven or eight weeks old. By contrast, a normal chicken's lifespan is eight to ten years.

In his April 14, 2003 article in the *New Yorker*, Michael Specter describes his first visit to a chicken farm:

I was almost knocked to the ground by the overpowering smell of feces and ammonia. My eyes burned and so did my lungs, and I could neither see nor breathe... There must have been thirty thousand chickens sitting silently on the floor in front of me. They didn't move, didn't cluck. They were almost like statues of chickens, living in nearly total darkness, and they would spend every minute of their six-week lives that way.

**There is also much cruelty in the raising of animals to produce eggs.** Layer hens are extremely crowded, with six or seven hens generally squeezed into a twelve-by-eighteen-inch cage. Crowding is so bad that a hen cannot fully stretch even one wing. The results of these very unnatural conditions are that the birds are driven to crazed pecking at each other, which harms and sometimes kills their fellow cellmates, thus reducing the producers' profits. To avoid this, the lighting is kept very dim (chickens are diurnal and not as active in low light) and the chickens are "debeaked." Debeaking is a very painful, often debilitating procedure that involves cutting off part of the beak with a hot knife while the hen's head is held by hand or in a vise. This is industry's cruel strategy rather than giving the hens more space and other improvements in their living conditions.

Because male chicks have no value to the egg industry and have not been genetically programmed to produce much flesh, they are discarded shortly after birth and disposed of by "chick-pullers." Each day in the United States, workers stuff over half a million live chicks into plastic bags, where they crush and suffocate them. Alternately, they grind them up while still alive to use them as fertilizer or to feed them to other livestock.

**Today's modern milk factories raise cows for maximum milk production at minimum cost – resulting in much cruelty to the cows.** The farmers artificially inseminate each

cow annually and then take her calf away from her almost immediately, so that she will constantly produce milk for human consumption. (Her male calf generally goes into a veal crate and is slaughtered four months later, as described above.) The cow lives with an unnaturally enlarged and sensitive udder, and she is likely to be kept inside a stall nearly her whole life, to be milked up to three times a day.

While the dairy industry would like people to believe that its cows are contented, today's factory-bred cows have to be fed tranquilizers to calm their nerves. As soon as their milk production decreases after a few years, they are slaughtered to produce hamburgers.

The following story by Dr. Michael Klaper, who spent much of his childhood summers working on his uncle's dairy farm and is now a leading advocate for vegan diets, dramatically illustrates how cruel the dairy industry is:

The very saddest sound in all my memory was burned into my awareness at age five on my uncle's dairy farm in Wisconsin. A cow had given birth to a beautiful male calf. The mother was allowed to nurse her calf but for a single night. On the second day after birth, my uncle took the calf from the mother and placed him in the veal pen in the barn - only ten yards away, in plain view of the mother. The mother cow could see her infant, smell him, hear him, but could not touch him, comfort him, or nurse him. The heartrending bellows that she poured forth - minute after minute, hour after hour, for five long days - were excruciating to listen to. They are the most poignant and painful auditory memories I carry in my brain.

The following two selections summarize the inhumane treatment of animals raised for food:

How far have we the right to take our domination of the animal world? Have we the right to rob them of all pleasures in life simply to make more money more quickly out of their carcasses? Have we the right to treat living creatures solely as food-converting



machines? At what point do we acknowledge cruelty?<sup>6</sup>

Every year millions of animals are born and bred for the sole purpose of satisfying those who like the taste of meat. Their lives vary in length from a few weeks to a few years; most live a fraction of the time they would in more natural conditions. They die in slaughterhouses where, if the tranquilizers have their effect, they know only a few moments of the awful fear of death before they are stunned and their throats cut. This is what all meat-eaters actively support, for there would be no batteries, no sweatboxes, no need to castrate male animals or artificially inseminate females, no cattle markets and no slaughterhouses if there was no one insensitive enough to buy their products.<sup>7</sup>

British author Ruth Harrison eloquently summarizes how animals are raised on factory farms:

To some extent... man has always exploited farm animals in that he rears them specifically for food. But until recently they were individuals, allowed their birthright of green fields, sunlight, and fresh air; they were allowed to forage, to exercise, to watch the world go by, in fact to live. Even at its worst... the animal had some enjoyment in life before it died. Today the exploitation has been taken to a degree that involves not only the elimination of all enjoyment, the frustration of all natural instincts, but its replacement with acute discomfort, boredom, and the actual denial of health. It has been taken to a degree where the animal is not allowed to live before it dies.<sup>8</sup>

**The conditions under which animals are raised today are totally contrary to the Jewish ideals of compassion and avoiding *tsa'ar ba'alei chayim*:**

- Instead of animals being free to graze on the Sabbath day to

enjoy the beauties of creation, they are confined for all of their lives to darkened, crowded stalls and cages without air, natural light, or room in which to exercise.

- Whereas the Torah mandates that animals should be able to eat the products of the harvest as they work in the fields, today animals are fed chemical fatteners and other additives in their food, based on computer programs.
- Whereas Judaism indicates consideration for animals by prohibiting the yoking of a strong and weak animal together, veal calves spend their entire lives standing on slats, their necks chained to the sides, without sunlight, fresh air, or exercise.

Rabbi Aryeh Carmell, a 20<sup>th</sup> century Torah scholar in Jerusalem, stated: “It seems doubtful from all that has been said whether the Torah would sanction factory farming, which treats animals as machines, with apparent insensitivity to their natural needs and instincts. This is a matter for decision by *halachic* authorities.”<sup>9</sup>

Rabbi David Rosen, former Chief rabbi of Ireland, uses even stronger language: “The current treatment of animals in the livestock trade definitely renders the consumption of meat as *halachically* unacceptable as the product of illegitimate means.”<sup>10</sup> He makes clear that he is not referring only to the production of veal and goose liver, the “most obvious and outrageous” examples of animal mistreatment, but also to common practices in the livestock trade, such as massive drug dosing and hormonal treatment.<sup>11</sup>

In light of the horrible conditions under which most animals are raised today, Jews who eat meat raised under such conditions seem to be supporting a system contrary to basic Jewish principles and obligations. The vicious cycle of misery that results from our addiction to meat is powerfully described by C. David Coats in *Old McDonald’s Factory Farm*:

Aren’t humans amazing? They kill wildlife —  
birds, deer, all kinds of cats, coyotes, beavers,

groundhogs, mice and foxes by the million in order to protect their domestic animals and their feed.

Then they kill domestic animals by the billion and eat them. This in turn kills people by the million, because eating all those animals leads to degenerative — and fatal — health conditions like heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and cancer.

So then humans spend billions of dollars torturing and killing millions more animals to look for cures for these diseases.

Elsewhere, millions of other human beings are being killed by hunger and malnutrition because food they could eat is being used to fatten domestic animals.

Meanwhile, few people recognize the absurdity of humans, who kill so easily and violently, and once a year send out cards praying for “Peace on Earth.”

Because of these violations and for the additional reasons indicated in the following chapter, I believe that Jews should seriously consider becoming vegetarians, and preferably vegans.

## **Responses to justifications for eating meat**

Many apologists for the exploitation of animals seek justification in Jewish scripture, but their analysis is largely based on a misunderstanding of two important Torah verses that, when better understood, actually endorse the struggle to improve conditions for animals. The first misunderstanding is the common claim that the Torah teaching granting humans dominion over animals (Genesis 1:26) gives us a warrant to treat them in whatever way we may wish.

That this interpretation is incorrect is demonstrated by the fact that immediately after God gave humankind dominion over animals (Genesis 1:26), God prescribed vegetarian foods as the diet best suited to humans (Genesis 1:29). This mandate is almost immediately followed by God’s declaration that all of Creation was “very good” (Genesis 1:31).

Adam and Eve’s original vegetarian diet was consistent with the kind and gentle stewardship that God entrusted to them

and to all humankind. Another indication of the true message of “dominion” is the Torah verse that indicates that God put Adam, the first human being, into the Garden of Eden “to work it and to guard it” (Genesis 2:15). To guard something implies that one must protect it, not exploit it. Based on these statements in Genesis, the Jewish sages saw human dominion as based on responsible and caring stewardship.

In support of this analysis, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Chief Rabbi of pre-state Israel and one of the outstanding Jewish thinkers of the 20th century, stated in his booklet, “A Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace”:

There can be no doubt in the mind of any intelligent person that [the Divine empowerment of humanity to derive benefit from nature] does not mean the domination of a harsh ruler, who afflicts his people and servants merely to satisfy his whim and desire, according to the crookedness of his heart. It is unthinkable that the Divine Law would impose such a decree of servitude, sealed for all eternity, upon the world of God, Who is “good to all, and Whose mercy is upon all His works” (Psalms 145:9).

The second error that the apologists for animal exploitation make is the presumption that the necessary implication of the Biblical teaching that only human beings are created “in the Divine Image” is that God places little or no value on animals. While the Torah does state that only human beings are created “in God’s Image” (Genesis 5:1), animals are also God’s creatures, possessing sensitivity and the capacity for feeling pain. So the fact that humans are in a different spiritual category than animals does not give us the right to treat animals as mere objects or machines for our pleasure. God is concerned that they are protected and treated with compassion and justice. In fact, the Jewish sages state that to be “created in the Divine Image” means that people have the capacity to emulate the Divine compassion for all creatures. Rabbi Dovid Sears, in his book *A Vision of Eden: Animal Welfare and Vegetarianism in Jewish Law and Mysticism*, in reference to the Talmudic teaching that we are to emulate God’s ways, states,

“Compassion for all creatures, including animals, is not only God’s business; it is a virtue that we, too, must emulate. Moreover, compassion must not be viewed as an isolated phenomenon, one of a number of religious duties in the Judaic concept of Divine service. It is central to our entire way of life.”

In his classic work *Ahavat Chesed* (“The Love of Kindness”), the revered Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan of Radin) discusses this teaching at length. He writes that whoever emulates the Divine love and compassion to all creatures “will bear the stamp of God on his person.”

### **Is today’s meat really kosher?**

The original intent of kosher slaughtering was to cause the animal as little pain as possible, as well as drain out the blood. And indeed, studies have shown that a quick cut to the throat with a sharp knife renders the animal unconscious within seconds, before the pain sensation ever reaches the brain. (Think back to the last time you accidentally cut yourself and did not immediately realize it.) Even PETA has affirmed that, if done properly, kosher slaughtering is humane. However, today’s kosher industry tends to focus *only* on the actual moment of slaughter, and the packing and preparation of the meat afterward. Very little, if any, attention is paid to how the animals are treated *before* slaughter.

One has to wonder if this can be reconciled with the original intent of *kashrut*. How can it still be humane if most kosher meat, dairy, and eggs now come from the same abominable factory farm conditions as does non-kosher food? Shouldn’t we be concerned — indeed alarmed — about the ways that food is being produced?

In the past, farm animals ran free in pastures or open country, grazed on grass, and were slaughtered only for special occasions, such as when Abraham slaughtered a calf for his angelic guests. Chickens were hatched naturally under mother hens and usually eaten by Jews only on Shabbat and holidays — and then only after the birds had a life of freedom to scratch, peck, and live as a chicken was created to do. There was nothing remotely resembling the year-round factory farm

conditions under which food animals are raised today. Therefore, although the Torah does permit eating meat, the conditions under which animals are raised today are a far cry from those used for the flocks of our ancestors.

Given that Jews are said to be *rachmanim b'nai rachmanim* (compassionate children of compassionate ancestors), can we as kosher consumers justify the cruelty of factory farms to mass-produce meat that we do not really need for nourishment? Can we justify the force-feeding of ducks and geese to create *pate de foie gras*? Can we justify taking day-old calves from their mothers so that they can be raised in very cramped conditions to be eaten as “tender” veal? Can we justify the killing of over 250 million male chicks in the U.S. alone immediately after birth at egg-laying hatcheries — a total waste of sentient animal life — because they cannot lay eggs and have not been genetically programmed to grow as much flesh as the meat-producing breeds? Can we justify artificially impregnating cows every year on “rape racks” so that they will be able to produce more milk; or artificially inseminating turkeys to get fertile hatching eggs, because the birds have been bred to get so fat they can no longer mate naturally? Can we justify the many other ways that animals are unnecessarily exploited and mistreated in our society to meet consumer’s claimed needs?

Some meat-eaters point to the biblical animal sacrifices as a justification for their eating meat today. But, according to Maimonides, the sacrifices were a concession to the primitive conditions in biblical times. Since sacrifices were the universal expression of religion in that period, if Moses had tried to eliminate them, his mission might have failed and Judaism might have disappeared. Instead, limitations were placed on sacrifices in Judaism: They were confined to one central location [instead of each family having a home altar] and the human sacrifices and other idolatrous practices of the neighboring pagan peoples were forbidden.

The prophets often speak of sacrifices as an abomination to God if not carried out along with deeds of loving-kindness and justice. After the destruction of the Temple, the rabbis stated that prayer and good deeds should replace sacrifices in the absence of the designated site for burnt offerings, based on

the line from the prophet Hosea: “Take words and return to the Lord; instead of calves we will offer the words of our lips” (Hosea 14:2).<sup>12</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rav Kook wrote that there will be only non-animal sacrifices, such as fruits and grains, in the Messianic period when the Temple is rebuilt (speedily in our day!)

In addition, we should note that sacrificial animals had to be perfect specimens without any blemishes (Deuteronomy 17:1). This means they must have been treated very gently and kindly, to avoid causing any injuries that would have disqualified them for use in the Temple service. Given the horrendous conditions under which most meat animals are raised today, it is doubtful that any of them would qualify as sacrifices.

Another practice that raises questions about the modern treatment of animals is *Kapparot*, a ritual performed annually by some Jews between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. *Kapparot* involves the waving of chickens over the heads of participants, after which the chickens are slaughtered and the meat donated to poor people. As with kosher meat in general, the chickens for this ceremony now come from factory farms, often trucked in from miles away without any food or water – raising some serious questions about cruelty to animals. (For further discussion of the many issues surrounding this ritual today, see Appendix F.)

### **Is wearing fur consistent with Jewish teachings on compassion for animals?**

Jewish worshipers chant every Sabbath morning, “The soul of every living being shall praise God’s name” (*Nishmat kol chai t’varech et shim’chah*). Yet, some people come to synagogue during winter months wearing coats that required the cruel treatment of some of those same living beings whose souls, we declare, are praising God.

Should Jews wear fur? Consider these factors:

- What does the Jewish tradition teach about the treatment of animals? As discussed above, Judaism expresses very strong

laws and attitudes on the proper treatment of animals.

- How much suffering do animals who are raised or trapped for their fur actually experience?
- Does the wearing of fur coats have any redeeming factors that would override Jewish teachings about the proper treatment of animals?

Rabbi Yonassan Gershom, who lives on a farm in the very cold climate of northern Minnesota, does not wear fur. He believes that just because we *can* do something does not mean that we *should* do it, and notes:

The opening paragraph in the section on “Cruelty to Animals” in the *Kitzur Shulchan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law), section 191:1, makes three distinct points about the treatment of animals. The first part reads: “It is forbidden, according to the laws of the Torah, to inflict pain upon any living creature. On the contrary, it is our duty to relieve the pain of any creature, even if it is ownerless or belongs to a non-Jew.”

This is pretty self-explanatory, and is the part most frequently quoted by animal rights activists. And yes, the duty to relieve animal suffering is definitely there. But the second part goes on to say: “However, if they cause trouble, or if they are needed for medicinal purposes, or for any other human need, it is even permissible to kill them and we disregard their pain. For the Torah has permitted people to slaughter them.”

This is the section most often quoted by the opponents of animal activism. They point out that any use that might benefit humankind trumps any suffering the animals might experience. However, there is a third section that neither side ever quotes in this debate. To me, it is the most instructive of all: “Therefore, it is permitted to pluck feathers from a living goose with which to write, if no other pen is available. *However, people abstain from doing it, because it is cruelty.*”



This third part is the balance between the first two. Yes, we should avoid causing suffering to animals. And yes, there are times when causing pain is permitted for the greater good. However, there are also times when, even if something is permitted, and even if we need it (“no other pen is available”), we should still abstain from doing it because it is cruelty. If this applies to pulling out a goose quill that is actually needed for a pen, how much more would it apply to wearing a fur coat, which is not really necessary at all? With today’s modern synthetics, very few farmers, outdoorsmen, or mountain climbers ever wear fur anymore. It has become a luxury only.<sup>13</sup>

## **The pain of fur-bearing animals**

Let us now look at how that fur coat is produced. Fur is obtained from animals who are either trapped or raised on ranches. Both methods involve violent and abusive treatment of animals, which are far from Jewish teachings on the dignity and sensibility of animals.

Animals caught in steel-jaw leg hold traps suffer slow, agonizing deaths. Some are attacked by predators, while others often freeze to death or chew off their own legs to escape. It has been said that one can get a “feel for fur” by slamming your fingers with a car door. A Canadian Wildlife Service report gives an idea of the terror that trapped wild animals face and their desperate efforts to escape:

The stomachs of [trapped] arctic foxes... often contain parts of their own bodies. They may swallow fragments of their teeth broken off in biting the trap, and sometimes part of a mangled foot; almost every stomach contains some fox fur, and a considerable number contain pieces of skin, claws, or bits of bone.

Over 100 million wild animals are killed for their pelts every year. Many species of animals killed for their furs have become endangered or have disappeared completely in some localities. Millions of animals not wanted by trappers, including

dogs, cats, and birds, die in traps annually and are discarded as “trash animals.” Many trapped animals leave behind dependent offspring who are doomed to starvation.

Treatment of animals raised on “fur ranches” is also extremely cruel. Confined to lifelong confinement, millions of foxes, beavers, minks, ocelots, rabbits, chinchillas, and other animals await extinction with nothing to do, little room to move, and all their natural instincts thwarted. The animals are simply a means to the maximizing of production and profit, and there is no regard for their physical, mental, or emotional well being. Because of the enforced confinement and lack of privacy, naturally wild animals often exhibit neurotic behaviors such as compulsive movements and self-mutilation. The animals finally suffer hideous deaths through electrocution by rods thrust up their anuses, by suffocation, by poisoning (which causes painful muscle cramping), or by having their necks broken.

According to the International Society for Animal Rights, Inc., to make one fur garment requires up to 400 squirrels; 240 ermine; 200 chinchillas; 120 muskrats; 80 sables; 50 martens; 30 raccoons; 22 bobcats; 12 lynx; or 5 wolves.

### **Is wearing fur really necessary?**

Judaism puts human beings, uniquely created in the image of God, on a higher level than animals and specifies that animals may be harmed and even killed if an essential human need is met. But is the wearing of fur truly necessary for people to stay warm during wintry weather? As Rabbi Gershom noted above, very few people who work outdoors in cold weather use fur anymore. There are now many non-fur coats and hats, available in a variety of styles, that provide plenty of warmth and are much lighter and easier to care for than fur. As for style, imitation fur is produced at such a high level of quality that even among Hasidim there is a small but growing trend to wear synthetic *shtreimlach* (traditional fur-trimmed hats).

Based on the prohibition of *tsa'ar ba'alei chayim*, Rabbi Chaim David Halevy, Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv issued a *p'sak* (rabbinic ruling) in March 1992, mandating that Jews should not wear any fur. Rabbi Halevy asked: “Why should people be allowed to kill animals if it is not necessary, simply

because they desire the pleasure of having the beauty and warmth of fur coats? Is it not possible to achieve the same degree of warmth without fur?”

Inspired by Rabbi Halevy’s prohibition and by Israel’s strict laws against mistreating animals, there was an attempt in 2010 to pass a law in the Knesset banning the manufacturing of fur in Israel, with an exception for Hasidic *streimels* for religious reasons. Had this law passed, it would have made Israel the only country in the world with such a ban. However, the bill has been temporarily blocked, possibly by Knesset members who felt that attempts to ban the production of meat would follow.

But do we really need the Knesset to pass a law to tell us what is right? In his book, *The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues*, Rabbi Nachum Amsel, a modern Israeli author and educator, states: “If the only reason a person wears the fur coat is to ‘show off’ one’s wealth or to be a mere fashion statement, that would be considered to be a frivolous and not a legitimate need.” Rabbi Amsel also points out that hunting for sport is prohibited because it is not considered a legitimate need (based on *Avodah Zarah 18b*).

Rabbi Yona Metzger, the Chief Ashkenazic Rabbi of Israel, recently ruled against fur imports from China, where animals are often skinned alive. There is a growing awareness of the many cruelties involved in producing fur.

One has to wonder what kind of lesson young people are learning when they see worshippers arriving in synagogue in fur coats on the Sabbath Day? Instead of reinforcing the many beautiful Jewish teachings about compassion to animals, are we teaching them that expensive status symbols and conspicuous consumption are more important than respect for God’s creation?

If there were a reduction in the wearing of fur, not only would tens of thousands of animals benefit from our compassion and concern — we, too, would benefit by becoming more sensitive and more humane, as Jews and civilized human beings. We would be setting an example for the rest of the world that says: There is no beauty in cruelty.

## **Animal experimentation**

Because Judaism puts higher priority on human life than on animal life, it is not, in principle, opposed to all uses of animals, if there are significant benefits for humans that could not be obtained in any other way. But results from animal experiments should generally be viewed with some skepticism for the following reasons:

- It is difficult to gain insight into a human disease by studying an artificially induced pathology in nonhuman animals, no matter how superficially similar the two may seem.
- Because of differences between species, studies conducted on non-human animals cannot always reliably be extrapolated to humans. Many times, animals' reactions to medicines are completely different than those of people. Aspirin, for example, is poisonous to cats. There is an ever-growing list of drugs that were deemed safe after very extensive animal testing, which later proved to be carcinogenic, mutagenic (causing birth defects) or toxic to humans. Examples of differences in human and animal responses to medicines include: guinea pigs generally die when given penicillin; aspirin causes birth defects in rats and mice but not in people; thalidomide was helpful when tested on laboratory animals but causes birth defects in people; insulin causes deformities in laboratory animals but not in people.
- Contrary to the views of supporters of animal experimentation and what most people believe, medical historian Brandon Reines has documented that key discoveries in such areas as heart disease and cancer were achieved through clinical research, observations of patients, and human autopsy, and *not* through animal testing. At best, results of animal tests gave results that paralleled previous findings in humans. In other cases, improved

hygienic approaches led to the greatest medical advancements As medical historian Brian Inglis states: “The chief credit for the conquest of the destructive epidemics... ought to have been given to the social reformers who had campaigned for purer water, better sewage disposal, and improved living standards.”

- Misleading animal tests can sometimes be devastating for human health. In a number of cases, effective therapies have been delayed because of misleading animal models. For example, the animal model for polio resulted in a misunderstanding of the mechanism of infection, delaying the discovery of a vaccine.
- Reliance on animal experiments and transplants from animals keeps people from considering their basic responsibility for their own health. If the billions of dollars spent on animal experimentation were instead spent on educating people about better nutrition and other positive lifestyle changes, there would be far greater benefits for human health. Of course, there are other factors that affect human health, including genetics, which are beyond an individual’s control. But lifestyle changes can make significant differences in many cases.

Perhaps because of these factors, animal experimentation has produced relatively little progress in many areas of medicine. Despite (or perhaps because of) many years of relying heavily on extensive animal experimentation for medical advancement instead of looking at other factors, such as diet, health costs in the U.S. have been soaring in recent years. This has led to major budgetary problems in many cities and states and nationally, with the result that spending for many other human needs has had to be reduced. Health expenditures have been increasing more rapidly than any other element of the federal budget; total health costs have grown from 6% of total GNP in 1960 to 17% in 2009, and are still rising rapidly.

## The question of necessity – again

Many laboratory experiments on animals are completely unnecessary. Must we force dogs to smoke to reconfirm the health hazards of cigarettes? Do we have to starve dogs and monkeys to understand human starvation? Do we need to cut, blind, burn, and chemically destroy animals to produce another type of lipstick, mascara or shampoo?

A reduction in animal experiments would not mean that experiments have to be done on people. Healthier lifestyles would avoid the need for many experiments. Also many approaches to advancing medical knowledge have been developed that do not involve animal experimentation. These include epidemiological studies, the use of computer models, and cell and tissue cultures in vitro.

Human health can best be advanced by improvements in hygiene, better diets and other lifestyle changes, and through clinical studies. As the poet Alexander Pope put it, “The proper study of mankind is man.” Advances in human health do not depend on the torture and killing of animals in laboratories.

## Hunting and other blood sports

Throughout the ages, the rabbis have strongly disapproved of hunting as a sport. A Jew is permitted to capture animals only for purposes of human food or for what is considered an essential human need. But to destroy an animal for “sport” constitutes wanton destruction and is to be condemned. Based on the statement “not to stand in the way of sinners” (Psalms 1:1), the Talmud prohibits association with recreational hunters (*Avodah Zarah* 18b). A query was addressed to Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (1713–1793) by a man wishing to know if he could hunt in his large estate, which included forests and fields.

Rabbi Landau’s response in his classic collection of *responsa Nodah b’Yehudahis* follows:

In the Torah the sport of hunting is imputed only to fierce characters like Nimrod and Esau, never to any of the patriarchs and their descendants... I cannot comprehend how a Jew could even dream of killing

animals merely for the pleasure of hunting... When sport prompts killing, it is downright cruelty. (*Yore Deah*, Second Series, 10)

It should be noted that meat from animals killed by hunting with a gun or bow would not be considered kosher, and would therefore be a violation of *bal tashchit*, the unnecessary destruction or waste of something. Humanely trapping a kosher species and then slaughtering it properly would be permitted, but only if really necessary for food.

For similar reasons, “catch and release” fishing is also not in the spirit of Jewish teachings. The same would go for fishing contests whose sole purpose is to compete in catching the biggest fish. Catching fish for food is permitted provided it is a kosher species. And, because there is no required way to slaughter a fish, anybody can do it for themselves. However, if one is not going to eat the fish, but merely catches it for the “fun” of it, then one is needlessly tormenting a living thing for no other purpose except personal pleasure. Although one might think that releasing the fish means no harm was caused, the fact is that such fish are often so tired after fighting the hook that they die of exhaustion. Others succumb to infections because their protective coating of slime is damaged in the process of the fisherman handling them.<sup>14</sup>

Because Judaism opposes any cruel treatment of animals, it also looks unfavorably on rodeos, animal fighting events, dog racing, and the use of animals in circuses, because the animals are often mistreated while being trained for their acts.

## **Horse racing**

Like many other industries involving animals, the racing industry is built on the exploitation of animals, with cruelty and abuse common. While horse racing currently exists in Israel only in a very small way, there are plans to expand the races to involve as many as 2,000 horses and to initiate gambling on the races. The group Concern for Helping Animals in Israel (CHAI) is working to educate lawmakers, and also the public, about current horse abuse in Israel and how it will be multiplied manyfold if gambling on racing is legalized. CHAI stresses that

in England and the United States, when gambling is involved, the welfare of the horses is sacrificed.

On July 30, 2006, Rabbi Shlomo Amar, the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, issued a *p'sak halachah* (rabbinical ruling) against horse racing. The ruling concludes: 'It seems self-evident that one ought... not to participate in horse-races—neither in establishing them, nor by watching them: because of the pain to animals caused thereby, because it is 'a dwelling place of scoffers,' and because it is 'playing with dice' [the Talmudic term for gambling]."

Among the reasons the Chief Rabbi cited for his conclusion:

- Racing involves the premature death of many horses, and this violates the Jewish law against wanton destruction.
- Horse slaughter would create a risk that horsemeat would be sold in Israel, violating Jewish law.
- Whoever shows compassion is shown compassion by God.
- Using horses for racing is unnecessary; it necessarily involves cruelty, and it is conducted only for the purpose of making some rich people richer; therefore it is prohibited.
- Judaism discourages gambling because it enriches one person at the expense of another.

### **In conclusion**

Judaism mandates that animals be treated kindly. It is essential that this message be spread and put into practice in order to help create a society more consistent with Jewish values and to help end the horrendous conditions under which so many animals currently live.



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**Notes for Chapter 11**

<sup>1</sup> Samson Raphael Hirsch, *Horeb*, Chapter 60, Section 415

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, section 416

<sup>3</sup> In the structure of Jewish law, a principle that comes directly from the Torah text (*d'oraita*) is given more weight than one enacted later by rabbinical authority. So, for example, violating the law not to light a fire on the Sabbath would be considered more serious than the rabbinical “fence” making it forbidden to touch wood or matches from which a fire might be made (*muktzeh*.) The first is a direct prohibition; the second is a precautionary measure.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Yonassan Gershom comments: There is, however, a difference in the way that that animals and humans are created in the Genesis story. Animals come into existence simply by the command of God, “let there be.” With the creation of humans, however, God first creates Adam’s body and then breathes in the breath of life. This has led many theologians to see a difference between animal and human souls. In Judaism, the question of whether or not animals have a “soul” is complex, because there are five different Hebrew words that get translated as “soul” – *nefesh*, *ruach*, *neshamah*, *chayah*, *yechidah* – and they mean different things. *Nefesh* is the lowest level of “soul,” usually equated with the life force of the body. There is no question that animals have this level and are living things. *Chayah* in the kabbalistic sense is the template of the species, or “Platonic Ideal.” So a *nefesh chayah* is a “living being.” *Ruach*, meaning “spirit” or “wind,” is the emotional level, and Maimonides affirms that the higher animals (such as birds and mammals) have this, which would correspond to the limbic system in biology. Whether or not animals have an “eternal soul” (*neshamah*) that survives death is not within the scope of this book, since we are primarily concerned with how animals are treated here on earth.

<sup>5</sup> Abuses of farmed animals are described in detail in *Diet For a New America* and *The Food Revolution* by John Robbins; *Old McDonald’s Factory Farm* by C. David Coats; *Eating Animals* by Jonathan Safran Foer, and many other powerful books. There are also many videos online of undercover investigations that show the horrors of factory farming.

<sup>6</sup> Ruth Harrison, *Animal Machines*, London: Vincent Street, 1964, p.12

<sup>7</sup> John Harris, “Killing for Food,” in *Animals, Men, and Morals*, S. R. Godlovitch and John Harris, eds., Taplinger Publishing Co., New York, 1972, p.98.

<sup>8</sup> Harrison, *Animal Machines*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Carmell, Rabbi Aryeh, *Masterplan: Judaism — Its Programs, Meanings, Goals*, New York/Jerusalem: Feldheim, 1991, p.69.

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<sup>10</sup> Rosen, Rabbi David, “Vegetarianism: An Orthodox Jewish Perspective,” in *Rabbis and Vegetarianism: An Evolving Tradition*, Roberta Kalechofsky, ed., Marblehead, MA: Micah Publications, 1995, p.53

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p.54.

<sup>12</sup> In Hebrew, the word *dvarim* means both “words” and “things.” Hosea is therefore using a play on words that gets lost in translation: Instead of physical objects (*dvarim*), one can bring verbal words (*dvarim*). After the destruction of the Temple, reciting the passages about the sacrifices replaced the actual sacrifices themselves. To this day, the appropriate sacrificial passages are read as part of the Orthodox Jewish liturgy.

<sup>13</sup> From one of the dialogues between Richard and Yonassan during the early stages of this book.

<sup>14</sup> See Jacoby, Jeff, “Hooked on a Cruel Sport,”  
<http://www.aish.com/ci/sam/48944011.html>



Yonassan Gershom with his rescue cat, Sapphire,  
on his hobby farm in northern Minnesota.

## Chapter 12

### Should Jews be vegetarians – or even vegans?

*And God said, “Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of the earth, and every fruit tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for food...” — Genesis 1:29*

*The dietary laws are designed to teach us compassion and to lead us gently to vegetarianism. — Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Chief Rabbi of Efrat, Israel*

*What was the necessity for the entire procedure of ritual slaughter? For the sake of self-discipline. It is far more appropriate for man not to eat meat; only if he has a strong desire for meat does the Torah permit it, and even this only after the trouble and inconvenience necessary to satisfy his desire. Perhaps because of the bother and annoyance of the whole procedure, he will be restrained from such a strong and uncontrollable desire for meat. — Rabbi Solomon Efraim Luchitz, in his work *Kli Yakar**

As a vegetarian and later a vegan activist in the Jewish community for over 30 years, I believe it is essential that Jews consider how plant-based diets are most consistent with basic

Jewish teachings, can improve the health of Jews and others, can help stabilize the world's climate, and can help reduce human hunger and environmental dangers. I hope this chapter helps start a respectful dialogue about, "Should Jews Be Vegetarians – or even Vegans?" I think such a dialogue would be a *Kiddush Hashem* (a sanctification of God's name), since it would help make Jews (and others) aware of the many benefits of non-meat diets and of how they can assist in creating healthier people and a healthier planet. Widespread discussions of the many moral issues related to our diets can help revitalize Judaism by showing the relevance of eternal Jewish teachings to our most critical problems.

### **Six ways that animal-based diets violate basic Jewish teachings**

As I have been arguing for many years, animal-based diets conflict with basic Jewish values in at least six important areas:

1. While Judaism mandates that people should be very careful about preserving their health and their lives, numerous scientific studies have linked animal-based diets directly to heart disease, stroke, many forms of cancer, and other chronic degenerative diseases.
2. While Judaism forbids *tsa'ar ba'alei chayim*, inflicting unnecessary pain on animals most farm animals — including those raised for kosher consumers — are raised on "factory farms" where they live in cramped, confined spaces, and are often drugged, mutilated, and denied fresh air, sunlight, exercise, and any enjoyment of life, before they are consumed.
3. While Judaism teaches that "the earth is the Lord's" (Psalm 24:1) and that we are to be God's partners and co-workers in preserving the world, modern intensive livestock agriculture contributes far more than does plant-based agriculture to climate change, soil erosion and depletion, air and water pollution, overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, destruction of tropical rainforests and other habitats, and other forms of environmental destruction.

4. While Judaism mandates *bal tashchit*, that we are not to waste or unnecessarily destroy anything of value, nor use more than is needed to accomplish a purpose, the production of animal-source protein is built on an extremely wasteful pyramid of resources (compared to plant protein production): overuse and waste of feed, land, fresh water, energy (most of it “dirty”), and other resources.

5. While Judaism stresses that we are to provide for the poor and share our bread with the hungry, over 70% of the grain grown in the United States is very inefficiently funneled through animals to produce meat, milk, and eggs while an estimated 20 million people worldwide die each year from hunger and its effects. If we produced fewer animals and ate more “bread” ourselves (grains and beans, fruits and vegetables), we could share so much more of the ‘loaf’ with the world’s one billion hungry people.

6. While Judaism teaches that we must seek and pursue peace, and that violence can result from unjust conditions, diets high in animal protein monopolize resources, creating a shortage of affordable land, food, water, and energy for the poor, especially in the underdeveloped world. This exacerbates the tension between haves and have-nots and may fuel social unrest, violence, and war.

One could say “*dayenu*” (it would be enough) after any one of these arguments. Each one by itself constitutes a serious conflict between Jewish values and current practice that should encourage every conscientious Jew to seriously consider adopting a plant-based diet. Combined, they make an even more compelling ethical case.

Animal-centered diets violate and contradict each of these important Jewish mandates: to preserve human health, to attend to the welfare of animals, to protect the environment, to conserve resources, to help feed the hungry, and to pursue peace. Therefore, it would seem to be an important mitzvah for committed Jews (and others) to replace as much of the animal food in their diets as they can with nutritionally superior plant alternatives: tofu, stir fried vegetables, and veggie burgers,

baked beans, and chick pea curries, as well as lush salads and a variety of fruit, nuts, and seeds. These arguments are presented in more detail in my book *Judaism and Vegetarianism* and my over 150 articles and 25 podcasts of my talks and interviews, all of which are online at [JewishVeg.com/Schwartz](http://JewishVeg.com/Schwartz).

## **Imagining a vegan world**

The late Senator Robert Kennedy often said, “Some see things as they are and ask why. I dream of things that never were and ask why not.”

So yes, why not? Why not a vegetarian world? Or even better, since we are dreaming after all, why not a vegan world? When one considers all the harm that comes from the current widespread production and consumption of animal products, it is hard to believe that many more people have not recognized the importance of moving toward such a world. So let us imagine what a vegan world would be like.

**It would be a world with far healthier people.** Numerous studies show that plant-based diets can sharply reduce the risk factors for heart disease, various types of cancer, strokes, and other chronic degenerative diseases. Dr. Dean Ornish, Dr. Caldwell Esselstyn, and others have shown that a well-planned vegetarian diet, along with other positive lifestyle changes, can reverse severe heart-related problems. Currently about 1.3 million Americans die annually from diseases linked to the consumption of animal products. This number would be sharply reduced when people eat a wide variety of foods from what the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) calls the “New Four Food Groups”: fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes.

**It would be a far more humane world.** We could eliminate the current abuse of the 10 billion animals in the United States and 60 billion animals worldwide raised annually for slaughter. Animals would no longer be bred and genetically programmed to produce far more flesh, milk, and eggs than is natural. The many horrors of factory farming, including the force-feeding of geese, debeaking of hens, and branding, dehorning, and

castrating of cattle, would be eliminated. We would no longer need to feel shame when considering Gandhi's statement: "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by how its animals are treated."

**It would be an environmentally sustainable world.** If we were no longer raising 60 billion farmed animals annually worldwide for slaughter, most under factory farmed conditions, there would be a sharp reduction in the current significant contributions that modern intensive livestock agriculture makes toward a wide variety of environmental crises: global climate change; rapid species extinction; soil erosion and depletion; massive pollution of land, water, and air, destruction of tropical rain forests, coral reefs, and other valuable habitats; desertification; and other ecological disasters.

Without the need to feed so many animals, we could let land lay fallow on a rotating basis, and thus restore its fertility. There would be far less need for pesticides and chemical fertilizers in the production of feed crops for animals. Of course, changes would also have to be made in our production, transportation, and other systems to improve the environment as much as possible, but the shift to veganism would be a major step.

**It would be a world where hunger and thirst would be sharply reduced, if not eliminated.** When we no longer feed 70 percent of the grain grown in the US and 40 percent of the grain grown worldwide to animals destined for slaughter, using vast amounts of agricultural resources to do so, we will have the potential to reduce hunger for the almost one billion of the world's people who are severely malnourished, and save the lives of many of the estimated 20 million people who currently die annually of hunger and its effects. When we shift away from current animal-centered diets that require up to 14 times the amount of water per person that vegan diets do, we can help reverse current trends that have been leading to an increasingly thirsty world. Also, since current typical diets require large amounts of energy, a shift to vegan diets, and other positive changes, would reduce energy drain, and give us more time to develop sustainable forms of energy.

**It would be a far more peaceful world.** Some may question this point, but please consider that the slogans of the vegetarian and peace movements could be the same: “All we are saying is give PEAS a chance.” More seriously, the Jewish sages, noting that the Hebrew words for bread (*lechem*) and war (*milchamah*) come from the same root, deduced that when there are shortages of grain and other resources, people are more likely to go to war. History has proven this many times. Therefore, a vegan world, in which far less water, land, energy, and other resources were required for our diets, would reduce the potential for war and other conflicts.

Creating a vegan world may sound utopian today when so much meat is consumed in the developed world and as newly affluent people in several countries and areas, including China, India, South America, and South Asia shift toward animal-centered diets. However, our current dietary and other practices threaten major catastrophes for humanity because of climate change, loss of biodiversity, water and food shortages, just to name a few problems. Therefore, it is essential that we alert people to the necessity of moving toward a vegan diet.

As the song from the musical *South Pacific* says, “If you don’t have a dream, how you gonna have a dream come true?” So it is essential that we keep the dream of a vegan world alive. And as the Zionist leader Theodore Herzl famously said, “If you will it, it is no dream.” Still, we must do more than just dream. We must work diligently to make that dream come true.

## **How a switch to veganism can help stabilize climate**

Much has been written about the many health benefits of a vegetarian diet, which I also covered in my previous book, *Judaism and Vegetarianism*. One area, however, has been largely neglected in the public debate: The impact of animal-based diets on the environment and its contribution to climate change.

As we discussed in Chapter 10, climate change is a major threat to the kind of world we just envisioned above. Because of the attention focused by Al Gore and others, climate change is now on people’s minds, but the many connections between



typical American (and other Western) diets and climate change have generally been overlooked. Even Al Gore himself missed this important point when he produced his award-winning film, *An Inconvenient Truth*. So let's examine how a major switch to plant-based diets can help stabilize climate.

Current modern intensive livestock agriculture and the consumption of meat greatly contribute to the four major gases associated with the greenhouse effect: carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxides, and chlorofluorocarbons. The burning of tropical forests releases tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and destroys the very trees that can absorb so much carbon dioxide and release the oxygen within it. In effect, trees are the "lungs" of our planet. Yet these forests are being cut down or burned on every continent to create space for grazing cattle and growing feed crops.

The highly mechanized agricultural sector, much of which is directed to producing feed for food animals, uses enormous amounts of fossil fuel to produce pesticides, chemical fertilizer, and other agricultural resources, as well as transporting the animals and their products. Running the tractors, trucks, and other equipment used to produce feed also contributes to carbon dioxide emissions. In addition, the large amounts of petrochemical fertilizers used to produce feed crops create significant quantities of nitrous oxides. Plus, the increased refrigeration necessary to prevent animal products from spoiling adds more chlorofluorocarbons to the atmosphere.

### **"Livestock's Long Shadow" – and the power of our food choices to reduce climate change**

Most global warming discussions over the past 20 years have focused on implementing changes in energy use but have given little attention to the impact of our diets. This trend began to change upon publication of a landmark 2006 report by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), estimating that livestock production globally is responsible for more greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), in CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents, than the emissions from all of the world's cars, planes, ships, and all other means of transportation combined. Had this report been out at the time Al Gore was making his film, I have no

doubt he would have included it.

The FAO report, *Livestock's Long Shadow*, projected that the world's current annual consumption of almost 60 billion farmed land-based animals will double by mid-century if human population growth and dietary trends continue. The resulting increase in GHGs would largely negate the reduced GHG emissions from all conservation and improved efficiencies in transportation, electricity, and other sectors. This, in turn, could make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to reach the GHG reductions that climate experts believe essential to avoid a climate disaster. While that doubling in population and meat consumption may or may not occur, it is troubling that in the face of livestock's strong role in warming the planet, many countries are encouraging the expanded consumption of animal products.

The FAO explains that animal agriculture's contribution to GHGs is so great because farmed animals, especially cattle and other ruminants, emit methane as part of their digestive processes (belching and flatulence). Methane is about 23 times as potent compared to CO<sub>2</sub> in producing global warming, when the comparative impact is measured in the conventional 100-year time periods. One cow fart may not seem like much – it might even seem like a joke to mention it – but multiply that by those of 60 billion animals every day, and the impact is huge.

The FAO also asserts that: (1) the production of animal products causes about 9 percent of total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, from the production of pesticides and fertilizer, use of irrigation pumps, extensive refrigeration, and other processes; (2) nitrous oxides are emitted from animals' manure and from chemical fertilizer used to grow feed crops and these gases are almost 300 times as potent as CO<sub>2</sub> in producing warming; and (3) when rainforests are burned to create grazing land and land to grow feed crops for animals, substantial amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> are released, and trees that would absorb CO<sub>2</sub> are destroyed.

More recently, an in-depth analysis, "Livestock and Climate Change," by World Bank Group environmental specialists Robert Goodland and Jeff Anhang, appeared in the November/December 2009 issue of *World Watch* magazine. The authors argue that there are sources of GHGs from the livestock sector that were overlooked, underrepresented, or

placed in the wrong sectors in the FAO report, and concluded that the livestock sector is responsible for *at least 51 percent* of all human-induced GHGs.

Goodland and Anhang assert that land use, including the destruction of tropical forests to produce land for grazing and to grow feed crops, not methane, is the prime source for GHGs attributable to livestock. However, methane is a powerful trapping agent, holding infrared radiation near the Earth's surface. Goodland and Anhang state that methane is far more potent than estimated in the FAO report, because methane is 72 times as potent as CO<sub>2</sub> during 20 year periods, the time in which most atmospheric methane leaves the atmosphere.

Goodland and Anhang call for the replacement of livestock products with plant-based alternatives, stating that this would result in rapid reductions in atmospheric GHGs, mostly because of methane's short half-life, while also greatly reducing ongoing world food and water crises.

Leading climate specialists have focused increasingly on the role of food in global warming, pointing out that there is no more powerful environmental action that any individual can take than adopting a plant-based diet.

In the fall of 2008, Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, chair of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, which shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Al Gore in 2007, called on people in the developed world to "give up meat for one day [a week] initially, and decrease [meat consumption] from there."

NASA's James Hansen, perhaps the most prominent scientific advocate of aggressive action to combat global warming, told an interviewer, "If you eat further down on the food chain rather than eating animals, which have produced many greenhouse gases, and used much energy in the process of growing that meat, you can actually make a bigger contribution in that way than just about anything. So, that, in terms of individual action, is perhaps the best thing you can do."

More recently, economist Lord Nicholas Stern, author of the British government-commissioned *Stern Review on the Economics of Climate Change*, declared that people need to shift toward plant-based diets if the world is to conquer climate change. "Meat is a wasteful use of water and creates a lot of greenhouse gases," the economist told *The Times of London*. "It

puts enormous pressure on the world's resources. A vegetarian diet is better."

## **Conclusion**

The aims of vegans and environmentalists are very similar: to simplify our lifestyles, show regard for the earth and all forms of life, and apply the awareness that "the earth is the Lord's." In view of the many negative effects of animal-based agriculture on the earth's environment, resources, and climate, it is becoming increasingly clear that a shift toward vegan diets is imperative to move our precious but imperiled planet away from its present catastrophic path.

Jews constitute only a small percentage of the world's population. However, we have powerful environmental teachings that can make a major difference if properly applied. It is imperative that Jews strive to be "a light unto the nations" and to work for *tikkun olam* — the healing and repair of our unjust and endangered world. This mission must include the lightening of the immense burden of human diets on animals, on the environment, and on the world's poor and hungry. To do so is to demonstrate the relevance of Judaism's eternal teachings to the problems of the world today. I sincerely hope that we — and the rest of the world — begin making the necessary changes before it is too late.

## Chapter 13

### Should prayer inspire activism?

*Prayer is meaningless unless it is subversive, unless it seeks to overthrow and to ruin the pyramids of callousness, hatred, opportunism, and falsehoods. The liturgical movement must become a revolutionary movement, seeking to overthrow the forces that continue to destroy the promise, the hope, the vision.*

— Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel<sup>1</sup>

As Rabbi Heschel challenges us with these words, prayers should help transform people and inspire them to actively pursue a more humane, compassionate, just, peaceful, and environmentally sustainable world. But unfortunately the opposite is often the case.

A study published in 2005 by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life found that while Jews generally are more liberal than any other American religious group, there are significant differences between Jews who regularly attend religious services and those who don't. The study found that Jews who attend synagogue services at least once a week were twice as likely to support the war in Iraq and to define themselves as politically conservative than were Jews who seldom or never go to synagogue.<sup>2</sup>

I have been a member of my Orthodox synagogue since 1968. My experiences there have been the most important in shaping my views about the failure of services to inspire people to become more actively involved in relating Jewish values to society's ills. I appreciate the many prayer leaders for their great skill and dedication to keep the *minyanim* (prayer groups) moving along without a hitch. Day by day, week by week, the programs and services and holidays are carried out very well. But as for the long- range goals of preserving our planet, feeding its people, ending its wars, there is little awareness.

As I attend Shabbat (Sabbath) services in my modern Orthodox synagogue, I often think about the tremendous collective wisdom, skills, and generosity among the hundreds of *daveners* (worshippers), and what an important impact their abilities and positive traits could achieve if addressed toward climate change — the most urgent, immediate problem facing the world today — as well as other critical societal threats. I believe that God would welcome that kind of involvement along with, and inspired by, our prayers. But the *davening* does not seem to impel worshippers to apply the challenging words of the prayers toward improving the precious world that God has given us.

Of course I am not recommending that Jews (or others) attend religious services less often. Rather, I would like to see them try to apply the lessons contained in the *siddur* (prayerbook) about God's compassion and other ideals into their practical and communal lives.

### **Some Shabbat morning prayers that address the environment and animals**

The Shabbat morning prayers remind us in many places of Judaism's tremendous concern for the environment and for animals, both of which have many implications for activism. If we would only listen to the implications of the prayers we recite, they would be a spur to action that would help revitalize Judaism and ultimately help to shift our world from its current dangerous path.

For example, in the *Baruch Sheh'amar* prayer, the *siddur*

says: “Blessed is the One (God) Who has compassion on the earth; blessed is the One Who has compassion on the creatures [animals and people].” What a far better world it would be if, consistent with the key Talmudic principle that we are to imitate God’s qualities, more Jews understood that these statements in the *siddur* obligate us to help feed the hungry, protect the environment, and work to end the current widespread mistreatment of people and animals.

In the Shabbat services, God is called *Rachum* (the Merciful One) and *Av Ha-Rachamim* (Father of Mercies). Since we are to imitate God, we too should be merciful. The Talmud states that Jews are to be *rachmanim b’nai rachmanim* (merciful children of merciful ancestors) and that one who is not compassionate cannot truly be of the seed of Abraham, our father (Bezah 32b). It also states that Heaven grants compassion to those who are compassionate to others, and withholds it from those who are not (*Shabbat* 151b).

In the important *Ashrei* section (Psalm 145), recited twice during every Shabbat morning service, the Psalmist states (verse 9) that God is good to all, and that God’s mercies are over all of God’s works (including both people and animals). According to Rabbi Dovid Sears, in his book *The Vision of Eden: Animal Welfare and Vegetarianism in Jewish Law and Mysticism*, this verse is “the touchstone of the rabbinic attitude toward animal welfare, appearing in a number of contexts in Torah literature.” Referring to the Talmudic teaching that we are to emulate God’s ways, he states, “Therefore, compassion for all creatures, including animals, is not only God’s business; it is a virtue that we too must emulate. Moreover, compassion must not be viewed as an isolated phenomenon, one of a number of religious duties in the Judaic conception of the Divine service. It is central to our entire approach to life.”

## **All of creation is to praise God**

*Ashrei* is followed by a number of psalms extolling God that begin and end with *halleluyah* — literally “praise God!” The final psalm in that grouping ends with, “Let all souls praise God. Halleluyah!” The Hebrew word for “soul” used here is *neshamah*, a word that is etymologically related to the word for

breath. Based on this, some translations render it as “Let *everything that has breath* praise God,” which would certainly include animals as well as people.

*Perek Shirah*, “A Chapter of Song,” is a mystical hymn dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> centuries that is found in many traditional *siddurs*, although not generally part of services today. It portrays all living creatures singing their individual songs in praise of the Creator. The universe is filled with hymns as cows, camels, horses, mules, roosters, chickens, doves, eagles, butterflies, locusts, spiders, flies, sea creatures, fish, frogs, and many more creatures offer songs of praise to God. Several Shabbat morning prayers also reinforce this concept:

- The beautiful *Nishmat* prayer begins with, “The soul [or breath] of every living being shall bless Your Name, Lord, our God; the spirit of all flesh shall always glorify and exalt Your remembrance, our Ruler.”
- Shortly after the *Barchu* call to prayer, the *Hakol Yoducha* prayer indicates that “All will thank You and all will praise You ... all will exalt you ...” The Artscroll *siddur* commentator states, “Thus every facet of the universe will join in thanking and lauding God.”
- The *Eil Adon* prayer that is generally sung by the chazzan (prayer leader) and congregation together, indicates that God “is blessed by the mouth of every soul.”

Ideally, all of nature should be singing praises of God in a celestial chorus. It is hard to see this happening today though, when so many animals are so cruelly treated on factory farms and other settings, and so much of nature is being rapidly destroyed in the name of progress. One cannot help but wonder how many voices are now missing from that chorus.

An appreciation of nature can make our prayers more meaningful. Unfortunately, most Jews today, including me, do not get out to see nature through hikes and other activities as much as we used to, now that we have become urbanized and



spend so much time using technical gadgets for communication and recreation. Not only Jews, but also our society in general, is suffering from what has recently been called “nature deficit disorder” (See appendix H).

As Rabbi Heschel states, we should be looking on the world with a sense of awe, wonder, and radical amazement. He also points out that the greatest threat to religion is taking things for granted. The special *brachot* (blessings) to be recited when, for example, we see a rainbow or a fruit tree blossoming for the first time each year, as well as on more common occasions such as eating particular foods, are designed to slow us down and make us appreciate those experiences. They should remind us that, as a song in the Rogers and Hammerstein musical *Flower Drum Song* put it, “A hundred million miracles are happening every day. And those who say they don’t agree are those who cannot hear or see.”

### **An important environmental message**

There is a very powerful environmental lesson in the book of Deuteronomy that is recited twice during daily services. as the second paragraph of the *Shema*, one of Judaism’s most important prayers:

And it will come to pass that if you continually hearken to My commandments that I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve God with all your heart and with all your soul — then I will provide rain for your land in its proper time, the early rains and the later rains, that you may gather in your grain, your wine and your oil. I will provide grass in your fields for your cattle and you will eat and be satisfied. Beware lest your heart be seduced and you turn astray and serve other gods and bow to them. Then the wrath of God will blaze against you. God will restrain the heaven so that there will be no rain and the ground will not yield its produce. And you will swiftly be banished from the goodly land that God gives to you.

The message seems clear. If we put God's teachings into practice and take care of the earth as we are commanded, then we will have blessings of prosperity and peace. However, if we turn to false modern gods, such as materialism, egoism, hedonism, and chauvinism, and put these traits before our wise *mitzvot*, then we will be cursed with many environmental and other societal problems. If Jews would take this message to heart — a message that is recited morning and evening by religious Jews as well as at bedtime by many — and apply it toward working for a better world, what a wonderful difference that could make!

Another important prayer, the *Aleinu*, which is recited near the end of every synagogue service, tells us what our role should be: *L'takein olam b'malchut Shaddai* — “to perfect the world under the reign of the Almighty.” This is the basis of the Jewish mandate for *tikkun olam*, to heal, repair, and transform the world. If this challenging message were taken seriously and applied on a daily basis, what a far better world it would be. Appendices D and E list some of the many Jewish groups already applying this message, but far more needs to be done.

### **A personal synagogue experience that made a difference**

I had a personal experience that illustrates how an inspiring moment at a synagogue service can make a difference. In the early 1970s, I was asked to be Third Vice President of my synagogue, with the responsibility of seeing that the youth programs ran smoothly. At the time, I was busy with family and professional responsibilities, plus I felt alienated by the lack of social consciousness of many people in the synagogue. After some soul searching, I decided to not accept the position.

Then came Yom Kippur, during which we recite the *al chet*, a long list of communal sins. Suddenly I was faced with the “*al chet* (for the sin) of casting off responsibility.” I thought back to my reasons for refusing the youth program position. Was I casting off my responsibility? Yes, indeed -- I was. So I decided to accept the position and make sure that Jewish values such as *gemilut chesed* (doing acts of kindness) were an essential part of the synagogue's youth activities. Every year

since then, I try to pay special attention to that specific *al chet* and to ask myself, “Are there any responsibilities I am casting off by taking the easy way out?”

### **Statements that can enhance prayer experiences**

The following are some anonymous statements about prayer and activism from a handout I received many years ago as part of a High Holidays (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) package of inspirational material. To this day, I still find them helpful, and review them annually during these important holidays:

- Pray as if everything depends on God and act as if everything depends on you.
- Prayer does not change God, but it changes him (or her) who prays.
- Our prayers are answered not when we are given what we ask for, but when we are challenged to be what we can be.
- True worship is not a petition to God; it is a sermon to ourselves.
- Prayer is answered when it enables us to act as God desires.

### **“Religious behaviorism” or active involvement?**

Unfortunately, worship services don’t always inspire people to greater activism in working for a better world. Many people (often including me) settle for what Rabbi Heschel called “religious behaviorism.” They recite the prayers mechanically, without really considering how the holy words can inspire us to change our communities and ourselves and face up to local and global problems. For some Jews, attendance at prayer services is often a social event, based more on tradition and habit than on a desire for genuine communion

with God or a desire to be inspired to greater awareness and activism.

It is my hope that more rabbis, educators, and other Jewish leaders will use sermons, classes, articles and other strategies to help *daveners* better absorb and apply the many powerful messages in the eternal Jewish prayers. Involvement in trying to improve the environment and conditions for the world's people can also make the *davening* experience more meaningful. As Rabbi Heschel states, "Prayer and prejudice cannot dwell in the same heart. Worship without compassion is worse than self-deception; it is an abomination."<sup>3</sup> Prayers and social activist activities need not be considered separate. Ideally, they should complement each other.

This is consistent with an approach that Rabbi Arthur Waskow, director of the Shalom Center, stresses: to apply the challenging teaching of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel that one should carry on politics as if it were prayer and carry out prayer as if it were politics. After marching with the Reverend Martin Luther King in the second civil rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, Rabbi Heschel said, "I felt as if my feet were praying."

If more Jews took this approach and strove to put the prayers into practice, this could release a great potential to help revitalize Judaism. It could move our imperiled planet toward a more just, humane, and environmentally sustainable path, toward a time when "no one shall hurt nor destroy in all of God's holy mountain" (Isaiah 11:9).

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### Notes for chapter 13

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Quoted in "On Prayer," *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, Susannah Heschel, ed., Farrar Straus Giroux, New York, 1996, p. 257

<sup>2</sup> "U.S. poll: Synagogue-goers more likely to be politically conservative." <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/536788.html>

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1959), p. 87.

## Chapter 14

### Revitalizing Judaism

*Little does contemporary religion ask of man. It is ready to offer comfort; it has no courage to challenge. It is ready to offer edification; it has no courage to break the idols, to shatter callousness. The trouble is that religion has become “religion” — institution, dogma, ritual. It is no longer an event. Its acceptance involves neither risk nor strain*

—Abraham Joshua Heschel<sup>1</sup>

*We must cultivate a sense for injustice, impatience with vulgarity, a capacity for moral indignation, a will to re-adjust society itself when it becomes complacent and corrupt.*

— Abraham Joshua Heschel<sup>2</sup>

*What young people need is not religious tranquilizers, religion as a diversion, but spiritual audacity, intellectual guts, power of defiance. Our task is not to satisfy complacency but to shatter it. Our duty is confrontation rather than evasion.*

—Abraham Joshua Heschel<sup>3</sup>

Working to meet the challenge expressed in the three quotations above can help revitalize Judaism. Rabbi Heschel expressed the central role that Judaism must play in helping to solve contemporary problems.

Much of my own Jewish philosophy comes from Rabbi Heschel, whom I have often quoted in this book. Unfortunately, relatively few Orthodox Jews are familiar with his writings nowadays. I regard him as the ideal Jew, because he not only took Jewish prayer and ritual seriously and wrote beautifully on such a wide variety of issues, but also put Jewish teachings into practice in active involvement in many social issues, including supporting freedom for Soviet Jews, working for civil rights, and opposing what he regarded as an immoral war in Vietnam. I strongly believe that if many more Jews read Rabbi Heschel's books and essays and tried to live by them, we would have a far more sensitive and dedicated Jewish community. This, in turn, would lead to a revitalized Judaism and a far better world. Heschel writes:

Our civilization is in need of redemption. The evil, the falsehood, the vulgarity of our way of living cry to high heaven. There is a war to be waged against the vulgar, against the glorification of power, a war that is incessant, universal. There is much purification that needs to be done, ought to be done, and could be done through bringing to bear the radical wisdom, the sacrificial devotion, the uncompromising loyalty of our forefathers upon the issues of our daily living.<sup>4</sup>

Many Jews today are appropriately concerned about Jewish survival and the flourishing of Jewish culture and learning. And, as delineated in Appendices D and E, many Jewish groups are indeed attempting to apply Jewish values to today's critical issues. However, much more needs to be done in the face of the many threats to the world today.

Unfortunately, as we have already noted in previous chapters, too many Jews today seem to be paying more attention to *Fox News* and conservative commentators than to the words of Jewish prophets and sages, whose teachings resound with a passionate concern for justice, peace, and righteousness. There is too little active involvement or protest against injustice. Instead, there is much complacency and conformity.

Many Jews have forgotten the Jewish mandate to strive to perfect the world. Today's synagogues and rabbinic pronouncements are often unrelated to the critical issues that

face the world's people. God requires that we pursue justice and peace, and that we exhibit compassion and loving kindness. God demands that we protest against evil, but our synagogues have too often focused instead on ritual, self-interest, and parochial concerns.

A person who truly takes Jewish values seriously would have to be alienated by much of what goes on and is sanctioned in Jewish life today. As Rabbi Heschel stated, "One is embarrassed to be called religious in the face of religion's failure to keep alive the image of God in the face of man." Many idealistic Jews have turned away from Judaism because Judaism's teachings urging active involvement in the crucial challenges of today are not adequately disseminated or practiced.

For observant, caring Jews, the acts of helping the needy and caring for the world are not voluntary options but responsibilities and Divine commandments. These are not only individual responsibilities, but also obligations of every Jewish community and indeed of the entire Jewish people — obligations, in fact, upon the entire world. Our tradition understands this principle as a covenant — a mutual agreement that binds us to God. In this covenant, we assume the task of caring for and improving the world and, in return, receive the Divine promise that the world will be redeemed. The Jewish message is not only one of responsibility, but also one of hope.

Unfortunately, some Jewish leaders and institutions have forgotten that the practical expression of justice, in our own community and toward all communities, has been and must continue to be a major emphasis of Jewish living. It is a tragedy that the Jewish community has generally failed to apply our rich theology to the preservation of the environment. Too often the Jewish establishment has been silent while our air is bombarded by poisons that threaten life, our rivers and streams are polluted by industrial wastes, our fertile soil is eroded and depleted, and the ecological balance is endangered by the destruction of rain forests and other indispensable habitats.

The Jewish community must become more actively involved. We must proclaim that it is a desecration of God's Name to pollute the air and water, to slash and burn forests, to mistreat animals, and to wantonly destroy the abundant resources with which we have been entrusted. We cannot allow

any other needs or fears or concerns, however legitimate, to prevent us from applying fundamental Jewish values to the critical problems of today.

It is also unfortunate that many Jews are unaware of the rich legacy of the Jewish tradition and its focus on justice for both the individual and society. Indeed, Judaism provides a pragmatic path for implementing its progressive ideas. The Talmud and other rabbinical writings are filled with in-depth discussions, advice, and legal decisions on how to apply the principles of the Torah and the prophets to everyday situations. Judaism also offers the richness and warmth of an ancient historical community, a meaningful inheritance for each Jew.

Religious practitioners frequently mischaracterize God's demands. Instead of crying out against immorality, injustice, deceit, cruelty, and violence, they too often condone these evils through silence, while instead emphasizing formulaic ceremonies and ritual. To many Jews today, Judaism involves occasional visits to the synagogue or temple, prayers recited with little feeling, rituals performed with little meaning, and socializing. But to the prophets, worship accompanied by indifference to evil is an absurdity, an abomination to God (Isaiah 1:13). Judaism is mocked when Jews practice empty rituals side-by-side with immoral deeds.

One example of such cognitive dissonance is the case of crimes committed at the world's largest kosher slaughterhouse in Postville Iowa, where abuse of both animals and workers, as well as flagrant violations of American law (as well as halachah) in areas of taxes, serious injuries to workers, immigration, child labor, sexual harassment, perjury and fraud were found by government authorities. The owners were justly sentenced to many years in prison for these violations, yet many Orthodox Jews still mis-tell this story as "PETA is trying to shut down the kosher meat industry" or blame it on antisemitism. They fail to see anything wrong with the legal and ethical violations in Agriprocessors' meat production as long as the slaughtering cut is made properly (See Appendix G.)

Shlomo Rubashkin, former vice president the company, now complains that he cannot practice his religion properly in prison, by which he means primarily the ritual aspects.<sup>5</sup> But what about the other halachic laws he so blatantly violated when he was free – principles like honesty, integrity, and



treating your workers fairly? Don't these count as "religious"?

Jews today have too often failed to speak out against injustice and immorality in American and Israeli societies. While claiming to follow the ethical teachings of the prophets, many Jews have equivocated and rationalized their inaction. Rabbi Heschel blames religion's failure to speak out and be involved in critical current issues for its losses:

Religion declined not because it was refuted but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by habit, when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past, when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain, when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion, its message becomes meaningless.<sup>6</sup>

## **Suggestions for revitalizing Judaism**

**Building on Jewish progressive teachings.** Judaism is in many ways a radical religion. However, our Jewish schools and synagogues seem to be grooming mostly contented and complacent individuals, people unwilling to apply Jewish values to help shake up an unjust status quo. I believe that in this time of violence, oppression, bigotry, selfishness, and materialism, there should be greater stress on Judaism's powerful, radical teachings. These include:

- "Justice, justice shall you pursue." (Deuteronomy 16:20)
- "Seek peace and pursue it." (Psalms 34:14)
- "Be kind to the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt." (Which appears in various forms 36 times in the Hebrew scriptures)
- "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18)
- Bal tashchit" (You shall not waste or destroy) (Deuteronomy 20:19-20)

- Be a “light unto the nations.” (Isaiah 42:6)
- “If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?” (Hillel, *Pirkei Avot* 1:14)

These and other challenging ideas in our tradition should become watchwords in our synagogues, Jewish schools, Jewish institutions, and Jewish homes. This would help return Judaism to our radical roots and help Jews apply our teachings to societal problems.

**Using the Jewish Festivals as a spur to activism.** Many important Jewish teachings are reflected in Jewish holidays. Rabbi Irving Greenberg has written, “The Holy Days are the unbroken master code of Judaism. Decipher them and you will discover the inner sanctum of your religion. Grasp them and you hold the heart of the faith in your hand.”<sup>7</sup> Judaism’s rich and beautiful holidays can help raise awareness of how our tradition speaks to modern social issues:

**Shabbat:** We can highlight the important environmental benefits of Shabbat as a day of rest, putting aside gadgets and equipment, and refraining from striving to increase one’s wealth. As Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel states in his classic book, *The Sabbath*:

To set aside one day a week for freedom, a day on which we would not use the instruments which have so easily been turned into weapons of destruction, a day for being with ourselves, a day of detachment from the vulgar, of independence of external obligations, a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization, a day on which we use no money, a day of armistice in the economic struggle with our fellow men and the forces of nature — is there any institution that holds out a greater hope for man’s progress than the Sabbath?

Rabbi Samuel Dresner, a devoted student of Rabbi Heschel, suggests that the Sabbath Day should represent an armistice in battles between people and society, between people and nature, and between people with themselves. We are not to even pick a flower on Shabbat, not only because we should not harvest things, but also because we are to be at peace with everything, as in the Garden of Eden, for which reason we do not make or destroy anything on the Sabbath.

I always welcome Shabbat with joy as a chance to recharge my batteries, to renew family relationships and conversations, to catch up on my reading and, of course, to commune with God and God's creation. I sometimes wonder how I would manage without Shabbat. I get some of my best work done on Saturday evenings after a restful Shabbat, perhaps partly because by turning away from the endless barrage of messages, tasks, and data, I return refreshed and able to see things anew.

Of course we must maintain the sanctity of Shabbat and other Jewish holy days, but we can also direct the great peace and strength we gain from observing these days toward greater involvement on the other days of the week. I agree with Rabbi Arthur Waskow that the entire world needs a Shabbat, or perhaps an entire Sabbatical Year, to pause from efforts to constantly produce and amass more and more goods, to reassess where we are heading, and stop or reform the practices that are harmful to the environment.

**Tu B'Shevat:** An event on the Jewish calendar that is ideally suited to raising environmental awareness and activism is Tu B'Shevat, the "birthday of the trees," which has become a kind of "Jewish Earth Day" in some Jewish circles.<sup>8</sup> The traditional foods served at a Tu B'Shevat Seder are all grains and fruits, which make it a good opportunity to consider Jewish teachings on vegetarianism and veganism. When the holiday falls on Shabbat, it can be turned into an environmentally-themed Shabbat, including a Tu B'Shevat Seder overflowing with plant-based foods, especially fruits and nuts from trees that grow in Israel, plus environmentally-oriented sermons, talks, panel discussions, and debates, nature walks, and other appropriate activities. If Tu B'Shevat falls during the week, it provides a good opportunity for school children to get close to

nature by taking hikes, planting trees, studying relevant texts, reading and writing appropriate material, singing songs, and in other ways learning to appreciate our deep connection to nature. The holiday also provides an opportunity to discuss threats to Israel (and the U.S. and the entire world) from climate change and other environmental problems and from resource scarcities.

**Rosh Hashanah:** On this day that commemorates the Creation of the world, we should consider how the wonderful world that God has created is now imperiled by climate change and many other environmental threats, and vow to work with others to turn things around in the coming New Year. In praying for a healthy year for our loved ones, and ourselves we should recognize that having a healthful, meat-free diet is the best way to reduce risks of disease and increase chances for a longer life.

**Yom Kippur:** On this Day of Atonement and repentance, we should consider how we can repent and atone for all the ways we, as individuals, communities, and societies, have exploited and savaged our environment and vow to work to restore and improve it.

**Sukkot:** On this harvest festival, as we sit in our holy booths (*sukkahs*), exposed to the elements and smelling plants and tree branches, we might focus on Jewish teachings about food and preventing hunger. The poetic references to the cycles of sun, wind, and water in the book of Ecclesiastes, which we read on the Shabbat during Sukkot, could inspire discussions of renewable energy. Our prayers for rain on *Shemini Atzeret* can remind us of the importance of conserving water, especially in this time when many areas face severe droughts.

**Chanukah:** The importance of non-conformity and fighting for one's beliefs should be stressed, with the victory of the holy few (the Maccabees) against the far stronger, pagan Syrian-Greeks as an example. It is also a good opportunity to consider how we can make our oil last longer, just as occurred miraculously in the holy Temple.

**Passover:** The themes of liberation and freedom from oppression can lead to Seder table discussions about democracy and civil liberties. It is also a good time to consider the implications of the oft-quoted Jewish mandate that we should be kind to the stranger since “we were slaves in Egypt.”

**Shavuot:** On this holiday that commemorates the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people, we might study during the traditional all-night *Tikkun Leil Shavuot* gathering to learn Torah some of the Torah’s teachings about justice, compassion, peace, environmental preservation, community, kindness, and helping our neighbors. The book of Ruth that is read on Shavuot is an especially valuable source for discussions on kindness.

**Tisha B’Av:** On this sad day that commemorates the destruction of both our ancient holy Temples, we should recognize that today it is not only holy temples and the residents of the holy city of Jerusalem that are threatened with destruction, but the whole world as well. We should actively work to avert an impending, unprecedented climate catastrophe and other threats to the planet.

As you can see, every Jewish holiday provides an excellent occasion to increase awareness and sensitivity about Jewish teachings that speak to current crises. I suggest connections between Shabbat and all of the Jewish festivals and other sacred days to vegetarianism in my articles in the holiday section at [JewishVeg.com/Schwartz](http://JewishVeg.com/Schwartz). We can similarly tie all the Jewish holy days to other environmental and social justice issues.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow has written an excellent book called *Seasons of our Joy*, which follows the holiday cycle and explains how each of the holy days not only commemorates a historical event, but is also connected to the natural cycles of the earth. Each sacred day has its own theme and its own special energy. When a Jew is conscious of and tuned into this cycle, it can become the story of one’s own life as well. There is plenty of room for authentic creativity and innovation within Jewish tradition.

**Building progressive Jewish values into Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies and other Jewish events.** Bar and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies are a big part of the lives of pre-teen Jewish children. Such occasions often end up focusing on materialism and lavish parties and indulgence, especially as the boys and girls attend and compare many parties of friends and classmates, not to mention competition among the parents to “keep up with the Cohens.” However, with a change of focus, these events could also provide an opportunity for young Jews to reflect on and apply important Jewish values.

One group that tries to help infuse such occasions and other events with Jewish values is *Areyvut*, which means responsibility. They emphasize that Jews should feel responsible for other Jews and for working toward a better community and a better world.

Areyvut’s mission is to infuse the lives of Jewish youth and teenagers with the core Jewish values of *chesed* (kindness), *tzedakah* (charity), and *tikkun olam* (social action). Areyvut offers Jewish day schools, congregational schools, synagogues, community centers, and families a variety of opportunities to empower and enrich their youth by creating innovative programs that make these core Jewish values real and meaningful to them.

Areyvut’s fundamental belief is that sparking a passion for service in the young can inspire a lifelong commitment to charity, kindness, and social justice. Therefore, Areyvut creates programs that reach out to Jewish youth, building on their individual interests and putting their experiences into a meaningful Jewish and communal context. They encourage young people to engage in both hands-on service and philanthropy, in the belief that all of God’s gifts should be used to improve our world. They also believe that community service can benefit — and change — both the recipient and the provider of the service. Their target audience is middle school and high school students from all denominations of Judaism, in all types of Jewish educational settings, and of every kind of Jewish communal affiliation.

Among Areyvut’s many programs are *B’nai Mitzvah* and *Chesed Fairs*: They organize hands-on, community service fairs for schools, synagogues, and community centers to educate students about the many different ways they can make a

difference in their community. More information about Areyvut and its programs can be found at <http://www.areyut.org/>.

**Keeping long-range goals in mind.** Short range, day-to-day, week-to-week, goals are necessary for the proper functioning of a synagogue. But they are not sufficient in themselves. All too often, we fall into the habit of mechanically repeating the rituals and ceremonies without stopping to think about what they actually mean. This problem is not limited to Judaism, nor is it a new concern. “Familiarity breeds contempt” is an old adage that applies to almost any routine activity. There has always been a tension between the familiarity of using a fixed liturgy and the challenge of making that liturgy seem new and inspiring. The Talmudic rabbis were well aware of this challenge. Rabbi Shimon said:

Be careful in the reciting of the *Shema* and in prayer. When you pray do not make your prayer a form of routine but a plea for mercy and supplications before God, for it is written (Joel 2:13), "For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing" (Pirkei Avot 2:18).

By this, Rabbi Shimon did *not* mean to discard the liturgy and simply “make up” something new each time. He himself was very meticulous about reciting the *Shema* and other prayers in their proper order. Rather, he was saying, in effect, “Don’t make prayer a mere routine. Don’t fall into rote recitation. Take time to think about what you are saying and *make it real in your own life.*”

Much of bar and bat mitzvah training is taken up with teaching our young people how to read from the Torah and follow the services in Hebrew. This is all well and good. At the same time, we all know that there is a huge dropout rate among Jewish youth after completing bar/bat mitzvah training. Many young Jews see the event as a sort of graduation from Judaism, rather than the beginning of a deeper commitment. How can we keep them interested beyond learning the mechanics? For that matter, how can we bring back the adults who no longer come to minyan?

One possible solution is to plan for both short-range and

long-range goals. A short-range goal is to organize the daily prayer services. A long-range goal would be to spend more time on exploring what the words of our sacred texts mean in daily life. Consider the following story:

Back in the days of the American frontier, a missionary presented a Bible to the chief of a local Indian tribe. A week later, he returned and asked the chief how he liked it. "A very good book," the chief replied, "I'm on page one."

The missionary thought to himself, "Good, he's reading the Bible." On his next visit, he again asked about the Bible, and was told that the chief was still on page one. This went on for several more visits, until finally the missionary asked, "Exactly *how* are you reading this book?"

Well," the chief replied, "Each day I read one sentence, then I go out and see how it works in the world. When I read 'Let there be light,' I spent the whole day watching how light is reflected off things in nature, how it lit up the sky in the morning and how it faded at night, how 'the evening and the morning are the first day.' And this is what I do each day with your book."<sup>9</sup>

We could all take a lesson from that wise old chief. While there isn't time to do this kind of in-depth contemplation at the morning minyan, where people must daven quickly in order to get to school or work on time, it would be possible to incorporate such personalized practices into education classes. Insights gained at such discussion groups would, hopefully, be carried over into the *kavannah* (focused intention) of the davening itself. This, in turn, would make it seem more meaningful and relevant.

When older students are learning to lead the davening in preparation for adulthood, there should be an effort to relate the prayers to the issues that surround them. For example, what are the implications of the verse, "Blessed is the One (God) who has mercy on all the creatures," or "God is good to all, and His compassion is over all of his works"? How would these verses apply to the way we treat



animals and the environment? The same could be done with many other statements in the davening. We should be making a conscious effort to connect the words with our actions in the world.

There are many other creative ways through which we can help revitalize Judaism. It is my hope that wiser people than I will build on the few ideas in this chapter and suggest additional ideas, so that Judaism may become more of what it was always intended to be: a light unto the nations, a kingdom of priests and a holy people, and God's witnesses on earth.

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#### **Notes for Chapter 14**

<sup>1</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, Ferrar, Strauss, and Giroux, New York, 1967, p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.49.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p.1-2.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p.218

<sup>5</sup> "Rubashkin Dispute Highlights Faith Issue," *Des Moines Register*, <http://dmjuice.desmoinesregister.com/article/20100509/NEWS/5090342/1001/NEWS, September 9, 2010>

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, pp.1-2

<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Irving Greenberg, *The Jewish Way: Living the Holidays*, New York: Summit Books, 1988, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Connections between this holiday and the environment were made long before the invention of the secular Earth Day. In Israel, Tu B'Shevat comes at tree-planting time, and it is a time-honored tradition to plant trees in someone's honor or memory on this day. Much of the early reforestation of Israel was done with donations for trees on Tu B'Shevat.

<sup>9</sup> As told to Yonassan Gershom by a Lakota elder in South Dakota.

## *The Souls of a Million Children*



“The Planet is in our Hands” – school children at Sadot Elementary School, Bet-Dagan, Israel, participating in a literally hands-on celebration of the “green spirit” on March 11, 2010.

## Chapter 15

### Summary and Conclusions

*In this hour we, the living [post-Holocaust Jews], are “the people of Israel.” The tasks begun by the patriarchs and prophets and continued by their descendants are now entrusted to us. We are either the last Jews or those who will hand over the entire past to generations to come. We will either forfeit or enrich the legacy of ages. – Abraham Joshua Heschel, (The Earth is the Lord’s, p. 107)*

#### What a wonderful path Judaism is!

- Judaism proclaims a God who is the Creator of all life, Whose attributes of kindness, mercy, compassion, and justice are to serve as examples for all our actions.
- Judaism stresses that every person is created in God’s image and therefore is of supreme value.
- Judaism teaches that people are to be co-workers with God in preserving and improving the world. We are mandated to serve as stewards of the world’s resources to see that God’s bounties are used for the benefit of all.
- Judaism teaches that nothing that has value may be wasted

or unnecessarily destroyed.

- Judaism stresses that we are to love other people as ourselves, to be kind to strangers, “for we were strangers in the land of Egypt,” and to act with compassion toward the homeless, the poor, the orphan, the widow, even toward enemies, and to care for all of God’s creatures.
- Judaism urges efforts to reduce hunger. A Jew who helps to feed a hungry person is considered, in effect, to have “fed” God.
- Judaism mandates that we must seek and pursue peace. Great is peace, for it is one of God’s names, all God’s blessings are contained in it, it must be sought even in times of war, and it will be the Messiah’s first blessing.
- Judaism exhorts us to pursue justice, to work for a society in which each person has the ability to obtain, through creative labor, the means to lead a dignified life.
- Judaism teaches that God’s compassion is over all of His works, that the righteous individual considers the well being of animals, and that Jews should avoid *tsa’ar ba’alei chayim*, causing pain to animals.
- Judaism stresses involvement, nonconformity, resistance to oppression and injustice, and a constant struggle against idolatry.

This ancient, marvelous Jewish outlook, applied to the planet’s gravest problems, can help shift the planet away from its present perilous course to produce a far better world. Strategies to obtain a better world include:

- There should be a central focus in Jewish life on the preservation of our natural environment and the improvement of economic and social conditions. Synagogues, yeshivas, Jewish centers, and other Jewish

institutions should increase the awareness of Judaism's powerful messages about justice, peace, environmental sustainability and other values, and how these teachings can be applied to the problems of today. Hopefully other religions will apply their own teachings and join in these efforts.

- We should seek a fairer tax system, with a reduction of major tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans and highly profitable corporations. Instead of continuing these tax breaks while making major cuts in basic environmental, health, and other social programs in attempts to reduce deficits, there should be a major effort to rebuild our decaying infrastructure, produce more renewable energy, improve our educational systems and research capacities, and make other necessary investments that will create jobs, and thereby increase tax revenue and help improve the current dire economic situation.
- There should be major changes in response to the overwhelming consensus among climate scientists that climate change is happening, that it poses a grave threat to life on earth and human civilization, and that we—humanity--are both the primary cause of current climate change and the only potential solution. Preventing the climate catastrophe that many climate scientists are predicting should be a major focus in all aspects of Jewish life today.
- There should be a widespread effort to increase awareness that a large-scale shift toward plant-based (vegan) diets would provide numerous benefits, including significantly improving human health and reducing climate change, deforestation, desertification, rapid species losses, soil erosion, and many other environmental threats. There is essentially no way that the world will be able to avoid an unprecedented climate catastrophe and meet increasing needs for food, energy, water, and other resources without a major societal switch toward vegetarian and preferably

vegan diets, along with other positive changes.

- We should make major efforts to teach that plant-based (vegan) diets are the diets most consistent with basic Jewish teachings on preserving health, treating animals with compassion, protecting the environment, conserving natural resources, helping hungry people, and seeking peace.
- A global Marshall-type Plan should be established, led by the United States and Israel, along with other developed nations, to sharply reduce world poverty, hunger, illiteracy, pollution, disease, and other societal problems.
- There should be a major effort to resolve the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, as well as other Middle Eastern conflicts and conflicts throughout the world, for the great benefit of all the people involved, and so that more money, time, and attention can be applied to addressing today's many global challenges. Israel cannot survive, much less thrive, without an enduring Middle East peace. While recognizing the many obstacles related to Palestinian statements and actions, our energies should be directed at encouraging any Israeli government to seriously and continuously make real and painful offers for negotiations and compromise. The U.S. and Europe should support Israel in every attempt to achieve real peace.
- A commission of highly respected religious leaders, environmentalists, educators, business people, politicians, and other experts should be formed to investigate and report on the best approaches to reduce current threats and greatly improve conditions worldwide.

Of course, it will not be easy to carry out the strategies listed above. However, we must recognize the seriousness of the threats we face today, and that business as usual is no longer an option. Unprecedented changes in thinking and action must be made very soon and Jews, along with others, must play a major role in increasing awareness of the urgency of these changes in

order to avoid a catastrophic future.

Many Jews today justify their lack of involvement with the world's problems by stating that Jews have enough troubles of their own and that we can leave it to others to involve themselves in "non-Jewish" issues. Certainly Jews must be actively involved in battling antisemitism, working for a secure and just Israel, and engaging with numerous other Jewish needs and obligations. But can we divorce ourselves from active involvement with wider problems? Are they really any "non-Jewish" issues in today's world? Don't Jews also suffer from polluted air and water, resource shortages, the effects of global climate change, and other societal threats? Can we ignore issues critical to the future of our community, nation, and world? When people are poor, hungry, oppressed, disease-ridden, and victimized by violence, does not our tradition mandate us to respond, and is it not also very much in the self-interest of our own safety and advancement?

Perhaps the situation is, in mathematical terms, one of conditional probability. If conditions in the world are good, it is still possible that Jews will suffer. But if these conditions are bad, it is almost certain that Jews will be hurt along with everyone else. Jews must be involved in working for a just and harmonious world for the sake of our ethical values as well as our own self-interest.

It is essential that Jews (and others) actively apply Jewish values to current critical problems. We must be "God's loyal opposition" to injustice, greed, and immorality, rousing the conscience of humanity. We must shout "NO" when others are whispering "yes" to injustice. We must restore Judaism to the task of "comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable." We must act as befits "descendants of the prophets," reminding the world that there exists a God of justice, compassion, and kindness. Nothing less than global survival is at stake.

As indicated by the lists of activist Jewish groups in Appendices D and E, there are many dedicated Jews who recognize that Judaism has splendid values that can play major roles if applied to today's critical issues. It would be very helpful if many more Jews educated themselves on the issues, got more involved in Jewish life, and spoke out.

There is a battle worldwide between the forces seeking

harmony, tolerance, common ground, and solutions and the forces of fear, obstruction, hatred, bigotry, and demonization of people who are different in views, nationality, or religion. This book is a calling to join with the many, although yet too few, activist Jews serving our Covenant with God, with actions that respond to God's call for our partnering in building a more caring humanity and a better existence for all God's creatures.

The afternoon service for Yom Kippur includes the prophetic reading of the book of Jonah, who was sent by God to the city of Nineveh to urge the people to repent and change their evil ways in order to avoid their destruction. The people of Nineveh listened – but will we? Today the whole world is Nineveh, in danger of annihilation and in need of repentance and redemption. Each one of us must be a Jonah, with a mission to warn the world that it must turn from greed, injustice, and materialism, in order that we may avoid global catastrophe.

\* \* \*

This has indeed been a very difficult book to write, but as I did the research and writing, I saw Israel increasingly isolated, facing what Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak called a looming “diplomatic tsunami.” I saw the United States and many other countries facing increasingly more difficult economic conditions, and signs of climate change occurring more frequently. And I saw many Jews and others in denial about such issues and/or backing very conservative politicians. As I saw these things, the importance of this book became increasingly clear.

I hope that people will respond with an open mind and a desire to apply the arguments I have presented in pursuit of a more sustainable future. I very much hope that many respectful dialogues result, and that they lead to solutions to current problems.

My intent was not to offend, and I apologize to anyone if I did so. I certainly mean everything in a positive way, “for the sake of Heaven,” with the hope that the book will help revitalize Judaism (and perhaps other religions from our example), improve Israel's security and well-being, reduce antisemitism,



reduce climate change and other environmental threats and, in general, lead to a far better future.

\* \* \*

I would like to conclude this chapter with some questions that I have been trying to raise for many years about current Jewish life. I ask these questions (addressed to me as well as everyone else) with great love and respect, because I hope they will lead to positive changes that will be a *Kiddush Hashem* (a sanctification of God's Name):

- Are we defining Judaism in too narrow a fashion? Shouldn't a definition of a religious Jew include a passion for social justice, a moral sensitivity, a strong feeling for ethics and morals?
- Is coming to the synagogue more important than what happens inside? Are we transformed by our services to become better people, to do something about the injustices and Indignities suffered by our fellow humans?
- Have we forgotten who we are and what we stand for and whom we represent? Have we forgotten our roles: to be a chosen people, chosen to be God's servants and witnesses, a "light unto the nations," and a holy people, descendents of the prophets, the original champions of social justice?
- Are we too complacent, too ready to assume that we're on the right track? The patriarch Abraham began the history of Judaism by a radical break with the past, by smashing the idols of his society. Are we ready, too easily, to accept modern idols of conformity, materialism, secularism, and permissiveness?
- Do we realize that the task of religion is to be a challenge to the status quo, to prejudices, and a herd mentality, that complacency and taking things for granted are not consistent with Judaism?

- Are we taking our ethical ideals and prophetic teachings seriously enough? If we are implored “justice, justice, shall you pursue” and “let justice well up as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream,” why is there so much complacency about poverty, exploitation, corruption at every level of government, and corporate actions that negatively affect our health and safety?
- Why so few dreams of a better world through Jewish ideals?
- Are we segregating God In our synagogues? If God is sanctified by justice and righteousness, why are we so complacent in the face of an unredeemed, immoral, and unjust world?
- What would the prophets say about our society today? About Judaism in our time? About activities in our synagogues and other Jewish institutions?
- Moses said, “would that all God’s people were prophets” (Numbers 11:29), but where is the voice of prophecy in our synagogues and other aspects of Judaism today?
- Have we forgotten, amidst our many study groups, that it is not study that is the chief thing, but action?
- If “to save one life is to save an entire world,” why such silence in the face of conditions that lead to the deaths of an estimated 20 million people annually due to hunger?
- If every person is created In God’s image and we all have one Creator, why aren’t there greater efforts to combat racism, antisemitism, sexism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination?
- Consistent with our prayers to a God of compassion, shouldn’t we feel more compassion toward all of God’s creatures?

## *Conclusion*

- Considering the many threats to our (and God's) world, from climate change, destruction of tropical rain forests, depletion of the ozone layer, acid rain, rapid loss of biodiversity, soil erosion and depletion, and widespread air and water pollution, and in light of Judaism's strong environmental messages, shouldn't the preservation of the global environment be given greater priority on the Jewish agenda?
- If all Jews (or at least, all religious Jews) really put our splendid tradition into practice, can you imagine the effects? Would there be so much crime, violence, distrust, prejudice, and discord, and air, water and land pollution? Would our children be considered as future consumers, bombarded by commercial after commercial? Would we have so much "private affluence but public squalor?" would we have the misguided priorities that led to spending so many billions for the military and not enough for human values and a better environment?
- When considering what Judaism can and must become, shouldn't we consider the statement that Robert Kennedy often quoted: "Some see things as they are and ask why, I dream of things that have never been and ask, 'why not'?"
- In summary, when Judaism is such a sublime challenging, dynamic tradition, why isn't this translated more into our lives today?

I hope this book will help Jews and others respond to these challenging questions and will help revitalize Judaism and enable Jewish groups and individuals to truly apply Jewish values in their lives and community. As this book goes to press, we just celebrated the holiday of Hanukkah, whose very name means "dedication." Is it not time to rededicate ourselves to the creation of a far better world?

Richard Schwartz



## Appendix A

### The Making of a Jewish Activist

By Richard Schwartz

I am a *ba'al t'shuvah* — meaning “one who has returned” — a Jew who started practicing Judaism late in life. I did not grow up in a religious family and I did not receive a yeshiva education as observant Jewish children generally do today. Most of my current Jewish learning comes not from formal education, but from extensive reading and conversations with Jews from many different backgrounds, plus Torah classes and lectures over the past few decades.

Like most Jewish boys growing up in New York during the 1940s, I went to a Talmud Torah school a couple of afternoons a week after public school, in order to prepare for my bar mitzvah. But I was not then particularly interested either in Jewish teachings or societal issues. Rather, like most of my friends and classmates who didn't go to Hebrew school, I was primarily interested in swimming in the nearby Atlantic Ocean, playing handball, baseball, basketball, and other sports with friends, and rooting for the New York Yankees. I would devour every sports section that I could when the Yankees won, but a Yankee defeat would make me very sad. Nowadays I've lost most of my interest in spectator sports. I still support most New York teams, but very seldom spend any time watching them.

One aspect of Judaism that did interest me in my early years was the wisdom teachings contained in a section of the *Mishnah* called *Pirkei Avot*, the “Ethics of the Fathers.” This tractate, which contains short, pithy sayings from the early Talmudic rabbis and scholars, is a basic manual on how to be a good Jew. *Pirkei Avot* is still my favorite section of the *Mishnah*, and its passages have helped guide me through life, especially the following:

- You are not required to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from [doing all that you can.] (2:21)
- Be of the disciples of Aaron [the brother of Moses]: love peace and pursue peace, love all people, and bring them closer to the Torah. (1:12)
- Who is rich? The person who rejoices in his or her portion. (4:1)
- Who is wise? The person who learns from every other person. (4:1)

\* \* \*

After graduating from high school in 1952, I wasn’t sure what career to pursue, but finally decided to study civil engineering, mainly because that was the field that my older brother had chosen. Because I didn’t want to go to an out-of-town college and tuition was free at the City University, I attended the City College of New York. Because that campus was far from my home in Far Rockaway, I decided to take advantage of the option of taking my pre-engineering courses for two years at Queens College, which was closer to home. This decision was a major turning point in my life. Had I gone to City College, I would have interacted primarily with engineering students, people interested mostly in mathematical, scientific, and technical courses and concepts. At Queens College, I took liberal arts courses alongside students who had a broader range of views and outlooks.

Because I didn't drive a car at the time, I rode in various car pools to and from the campus. This put me in contact with a wide variety of people and ideas, ranging from very conservative to extremely radical. I started investigating current issues in order to refute some of the radical ideas that I was hearing for the first time. I soon began to recognize the injustices in the world and became imbued with the idea that I should be involved in struggling against these injustices. I began reading books like *The Grapes of Wrath*, and viewing films like *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, which inspired me to try to learn more and to strive to improve society.

During this time, my involvement with Judaism diminished to practically nothing. I saw the synagogues and Jewish groups as being primarily concerned with ritual for the sake of ritual, and with maintaining their membership rolls and social status. The Jewish institutions did not seem to be involved with the societal causes of the day and were totally irrelevant to me.

I was now so committed to working to end society's injustices that I seriously considered becoming an English major, in order to write and make others aware of what I was learning. I loved reading novels and reports about historical events and social issues. I yearned to learn more and to apply my knowledge in the struggle toward a more just, peaceful world.

However, family members, fellow students, and college advisors all pointed out how well I was doing in my pre-engineering classes (I had the top grade point average of all the students in the department) and stressed that I would have a much easier time making a living as an engineer than as a writer. I took their advice and remained in civil engineering, but my feelings about social issues were so strong that I seriously considered not being involved in the world of commerce and business. Instead, I thought about moving to Israel to work on a kibbutz. I saw that system of communal living, cooperative efforts, and desire to serve one's community as a model of an ideal community most consistent with my views at that time. I even planned a trip to Israel immediately after graduating from City College, in order to further explore that possibility.

Then, in my final semester, something occurred that represented another major turning point in my life. Because I had the top grade point average in my Civil Engineering class, I was offered a position as an instructor in the Department of Civil Engineering at City College, starting in the spring semester of 1957. I saw this as a great opportunity and quickly accepted the position. This would enable me to help people and to stay out of the business world, which I then regarded as a “rat race” that involved advancing one’s career at the expense of others. As a college instructor, I would be able to apply and teach the many concepts I had learned in my studies. I would also be working with material that I had mastered and enjoyed.

I did go to Israel in the summer of 1957, and I did spend some time working on a kibbutz. But my great excitement at teaching and the honor I felt at being chosen to be a member of City College’s Civil Engineering Department, working side-by-side with teachers whom I greatly admired, reduced my interest in living on a kibbutz. I recall spending my last day in Israel excitedly preparing lecture notes for the course on “Strength of Materials” that I would be teaching shortly after my return. At the same time, I had a deep love for Israel, which I regarded as a modern day miracle. Shortly after I returned to the United States, I gave a talk at a “cousin’s club” meeting at which I extolled many aspects of life in Israel.

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The next major change in my life came when I married Loretta Susskind in 1960. (Yes, we have been married now for over 50 years.) When I began dating Loretta, she was a social worker at a center in Harlem. We shared an interest in addressing social ills and helping less fortunate people. Loretta came from a more religious family and background than I did. She had continued her Jewish studies beyond the pre-teen Talmud Torah classes and had graduated from Marshalia Hebrew High School. Loretta wanted to introduce Jewish rituals into our family life once we were married. So she presented me with some books on the Sabbath, the *mikveh* (Jewish ritual bath), and other Jewish practices.

I read these books somewhat reluctantly at first, and then with increasing interest. I began to see that my ideas about



working for a better world were included in the Jewish worldview. I now understood the “task” from which *Pirkei Avot* says we are not free to desist is the ongoing process of improving the world. There was plenty of opportunity for a fulfilling spiritual, socially-activist life within my own tradition! In fact, the whole saga of Jewish history involved a struggle to maintain the Jewish people and its ethical teachings in the face of oppression, widespread antisemitism, hatred, antagonism, and violence.

The more I read, the more I became interested in learning about all aspects of Judaism. In the process, I began to incorporate some Jewish practices into my own life. At first I didn’t attend synagogue services on Shabbat mornings, but would find a nice quiet place outdoors and read Jewish books on a wide variety of topics. Around this time, Loretta and I purchased a set of five wonderful anthologies: *A Treasury of Jewish Quotations*, *A Treasury of Jewish Poetry*, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, *A Treasury of American Jewish Stories*, and *A Modern Treasury of Jewish Thought*.

As I read *A Modern Treasury of Jewish Thought*, I became increasingly thrilled to discover that there were brilliant Jewish thinkers who wrote eloquently about applying Jewish values to the world. I was especially excited by the writings of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. I relished his radical analysis of Judaism and his honest criticism of “religious behaviorism,” which he defined as performing the *mitzvot* (ritual commandments) without any real devotion or any attempt to relate them to the realities of our society. And I loved the powerful but poetic ways that he expressed his challenging ideas.

It was also very important to me that Heschel was both a religious Jew and an activist. He marched with Martin Luther King, advocated early on for the liberation of Soviet Jews, and spoke out courageously against what I regarded as an illegal, unjust, and immoral war in Vietnam — despite the disapproval of his views and activities from many Jewish leaders.

Through Heschel, I recognized that my earlier rejection of Judaism was not because of any problems inherent in the religion itself. Rather, it was because of what the practice of Judaism in the mid-20th century had become. As Heschel put it:

Religion declined not because it was refuted, but because it became irrelevant, dull, oppressive, insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creed, worship by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past; when faith becomes an heirloom rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion, its message becomes meaningless.<sup>1</sup>

I increasingly found that all my social ideals were included within Judaism, and that Judaism provides a structure for leading a meaningful and involved spiritual life — if only people would really practice it! I was amazed to learn how the Jews had maintained their beliefs and practices in spite of persecutions and harassment in many lands and historical periods. The more I learned, the more I was able to relate Jewish theology to current social issues.

Discovering the writings of Martin Buber further reinforced my emerging belief that it was actually the distortion of religion that I was so much against. I concluded that, to some extent, my religion had been “stolen.” Back then in the 1960s, many observant Jews around me seemed to be locked into ritual for its own sake, without seeing or applying the deeper values that could challenge an unjust status quo. People were reading about Moses confronting Pharaoh in the Torah, but few were confronting the oppressors of our own time.

\* \* \*

While teaching at City College, I studied for my Masters Degree in civil engineering. I was enjoying my teaching and interactions with students so much that I decided to make college teaching my career. However, I didn’t want to seek a Ph.D., because it would involve doing research in a relatively narrow area. Back then, many engineering colleges were accepting professional engineering licenses in lieu of a Ph.D., so I decided to pursue that path instead. This involved getting some experience working in industry and passing several tests. My teaching experience and strong academic background made

passing the tests a relatively easy matter, but I had to leave teaching for a while in order to get the required experience.

Before entering the work field, I decided to take care of my military obligations. At that time, the United States was in a major technological race against the then Soviet Union. In 1958, the Soviets had surprised the world by launching Sputnik I, the world's first artificial satellite. This was a wake-up call to the U.S. government, a warning that we were falling behind in technology. As a result, engineers were classified by the military into a special category called "Critical Skills." The government's philosophy at the time was that everyone should get some basic training in order to be ready if the United States was attacked, but that people with special skills should not be taken away for long periods from the more important work of improving the nation's technological abilities.

Therefore, I only had to be in the U.S. Army for three months. Those few months in the army were the only substantial time in my adult life when I was not focused on studying for tests, preparing class lectures and other talks, researching and writing articles and books, and dealing with other professional concerns. It was a valuable time for organizing my thoughts about social issues.

After leaving the army, I worked at Ammon & Whitney, an engineering company in lower Manhattan that designed the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge connecting Staten Island and Brooklyn. I didn't work on that particular project, but I did work on many other civil engineering design projects. Although I enjoyed working with other engineers and applying what I had learned, my desire to return to college teaching remained strong. As soon as I had sufficient practical experience, I arranged to take the necessary tests for my professional engineering license. Fortunately, because of my academic and teaching background, I easily passed.

My next step was to seek a position teaching civil engineering at a college. I thought that my academic achievements, my teaching experience, my professional experience, and my professional engineer's license would make this easy, but that was not the case. The only Civil Engineering Department willing to hire me was at Rutgers University, and then only if I also enrolled as a Ph.D. candidate there. Seeing no other possibility that would enable me to resume teaching, I

agreed. So I moved to New Brunswick, New Jersey, with my wife and first child, Susan Esther.

I enjoyed my new teaching activities, and once again did well in my engineering studies. However, I had difficulty choosing a topic for my Ph.D. thesis. This was a source of great frustration to me. I loved teaching and desperately wanted to continue it, but I absolutely hated the idea of spending endless hours researching a relatively minor topic that few people outside a specialized field would ever be interested in. I would much prefer to spend the time teaching and promoting positive causes. I became so frustrated over this that I even thought of dropping out of the Ph.D. program altogether. When people warned me that this would end my chances of maintaining a college teaching position, I replied that I would just teach at a two-year college.

Had I dropped out of the Ph.D. program, it would have greatly hindered my teaching career, because even community colleges began to require Ph.D. degrees for full-time teachers. Fortunately, I finally found an interesting Ph.D. topic, "Analysis of Circular Plates on Elastic Foundations Under Radially Symmetrical Loadings," that enabled me to use my mathematical and other skills. I also received National Science Foundation grants for two consecutive summers, which provided me with the time to work on the project. In 1967 I received my Ph.D. in "Applied Mechanics." This enabled me to continue my teaching career until my retirement from the College of Staten Island as a full professor in 1999.

As I was completing my Ph.D. requirements, I was informed that Rutgers had a "no inbreeding" policy. This meant that they did not continue employing people who had taught at Rutgers while getting their Ph.D. degrees there. The Rutgers philosophy was that, by hiring people from a wide variety of other schools, they would get the greatest possible cross-fertilization of ideas. An academically laudable position, but one that left me without a job.

So once again, I sent out resumés, and this time I received an invitation to teach at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. They offered me a position as an assistant professor with the possibility of a rapid promotion to associate professor, and I accepted. Pratt did not have a civil engineering department, so I served in the mechanical engineering department, because many

of the courses that I had taught were equally applicable to both civil and mechanical engineering.

In 1968, my wife and I moved to Staten Island to be closer to Pratt Institute. By then we had three children: Susan Esther, David Elliot, Deborah Ann. In 1970 I learned that there was an opening at what was then called Staten Island Community College (SICC). That was only about five minutes by car from my house, which would make it easier to help out with the kids. The position had a better salary and benefits as well, so I decided to apply. I was accepted, but only as a substitute in the civil technology department for a professor who had left for a year to help set up Hostos Community College in the Bronx.

I was told that the professor for whom I was substituting probably wouldn't return. However, he did decide to return, and that put me in a very difficult position. I had given up a tenured post at Pratt Institute to be a substitute at SICC. Now it looked if I would have to leave. My efforts at finding another position were not panning out, and I was becoming increasingly desperate.

Fortunately, the City University started its "Open Admissions" policy at that time, providing remediation to students who did not meet entrance requirements in Mathematics and English. Because of that program, I was able to join the SICC mathematics department, teaching remedial math. It wasn't the ideal job, but it helped feed my family.

Needless to say, this was a very difficult time in my life. But, as the Chinese philosopher Lin Yutang said in his book *The Importance of Living*, one does not know what is "good luck" or "bad luck" until the end of a sequence of events, because what appears to be a negative event often leads to a positive result and vice versa. In the Jewish tradition, there is a similar teaching: Joseph, who is sold into slavery by his brothers, ends up becoming an important official in Egypt and saves thousands of people from famine, including those very same brothers who had betrayed him in the first place.

And so it turned out for me, that my "bad luck" became my good fortune. During the difficult period when I was trying to find a new teaching position, I went to the director of an experimental department at SICC known as "The Place," which offered a number of interdisciplinary courses. I asked about the possibility of teaching in their department. They had no

opening at the time, but later, after I was teaching in the mathematics department, they asked me to teach a course on “The Impact of Science on Human Values and Problems.”

At first I hesitated. This topic was completely different from anything I had previously taught or even considered in much detail. At the same time, it offered the possibility of applying my interest in social issues. I decided to accept the offer. That was a major turning point in my life, because teaching that course started me on the path of environmental activism that I still pursue today.

Through the use of essays, short stories, and plays, the students and I explored the implications of the rapid explosion of scientific and technological advances on society and its problems. This was right after the first Earth Day in April 1970, when there was widespread interest in environmental threats, so we devoted a lot of discussion time to ecological issues. As I became increasingly concerned about the environment, the original course was replaced by a new one called “Environmental Issues on Staten Island.”

I was a relatively new resident of Staten Island, so I had to rely on local resources to help me teach the course. I pored over old newspapers and reports, interviewed Staten Island environmentalists, invited guest speakers, and showed films and videos. We also went on field trips to places like Fresh Kills landfill (then the world’s largest garbage dump). We also visited different types of housing developments, sewage treatment plants, and natural areas. Instead of a final examination, the students were required to write a report and give an oral presentation about some current environmental issue impacting Staten Island.

Because this course was so different from anything I had previously taught, I devoted a great deal of my time, energy, and thinking to developing it. In the process, I became increasingly active in responding to environmental issues, often writing letters to the editor for publication in the *Staten Island Advance* about local and national environmental and other societal concerns. I also spoke on these topics to various groups at the college and in the community.

After a number of years teaching “Environmental Issues on Staten Island,” budgetary considerations led to an end of “The Place.” As a result, I was no longer able to offer the

course. At first, this was a big blow. But I soon recognized that this “disaster” had, in fact, freed up a lot of time and energy that I could now devote to other activities. I was determined to continue educating people about environmental issues, and it dawned on me that perhaps I could teach a course that related mathematics to environmental and other global concerns.

At the time, I was teaching a basic math course for liberal arts majors. This was a course that students had to take in order to fulfill the requirements for their degrees. Most of the students were poorly prepared and even less motivated. So, instead of the usual course that included a smorgasbord of unconnected topics, I decided to offer a course called “Mathematics and the Environment,” in which basic mathematical concepts and problems would be used to explore current critical problems. We considered such issues as pollution, resource scarcities, hunger, energy, population growth, nutrition, and health, using basic calculations, ratios and proportions, circle diagrams, bar charts, line graphs, scatter plots, sequences, and elementary statistics and probability. In short, my course covered similar math concepts to those in the old course, but all the examples and exercises connected with environmental concerns.

The course was well received. I found plenty of valuable material in the daily newspapers and weekly magazines, which I used to create mathematical problems. The annual *World Population Data Sheet* of the Population Reference Bureau and that group’s many demographic reports were also very valuable. The class considered issues like percentages of the world’s population in the United States versus China, projected increases in world population, effects of infant mortality, etc.

Analyzing the computer-generated graphs in a book entitled *The Limits to Growth*, we saw that the world would face severe future problems if global population and industrial production continued to increase exponentially. Once again, instead of a final exam, I required written and oral reports on environmentally related topics, using the mathematics that students had learned in the course.

Designing this course resulted in my reading, thinking and teaching about a wide variety of environmental crises. As I worked with the statistics related to these issues, I became increasingly aware of environmental threats and the urgent need

to respond to them. During my first sabbatical, in the 1978-79 academic year, I wrote a course text called *Mathematics and Global Survival*. This book was updated and revised every few years to reflect changing conditions, and became the foundation for my later book, *Judaism and Global Survival*, which is still in print today.

\* \* \*

Throughout my academic career, my involvement in Judaism was also growing. After moving to Staten Island in 1968, my family immediately joined the local Modern Orthodox synagogue. I have met wonderful, generous, sincere, deeply committed people in this congregation. I have found many members to be extremely charitable, kind, and deeply involved in learning and *davening*.

Given these involvements and my personal friendships, as well as an awareness of own limitations and weaknesses, it is not easy to be critical of my own community. But I think some constructive criticism might be valuable. Through the application of Jewish teachings on social activism, we can join in the process of moving our endangered planet to a more just, peaceful, and environmentally sustainable path. It is no longer enough to ask, "Is it good for the Jews?" We must now also ask: "Is it good for the planet?"

I am deeply disturbed by the seeming lack of concern for universal issues among many of my religious Jewish brethren (as well as most other people). Within their own communities they are very caring and generous, but they often seem oblivious to issues that affect the rest of humanity. It sometimes seems that one can be more readily accepted in certain circles if one has intolerant, reactionary ideas, than if one has a commitment to Jewish universal values.

For this reason, I often need to go outside my immediate synagogue group in order to find support for my Jewish activism. Through my articles, talks, books, and letters to editors, I am able to express my societal concerns, but I often feel alienated from my local community in the process. How grateful I am to be living in the age of email and the Internet! The electronic age has enabled me to be in regular contact with many like-minded people around the world, express my ideas to



a wider audience, and to reach beyond the limitations of my own community.

In the early 1970s, partly in an attempt to increase my synagogue's involvement in social justice issues, I became co-editor of the synagogue's newsletter and frequently contributed articles. I was (and still am) searching for ways to demonstrate Judaism's meaning and relevance to the world. I sensed a great gap between the glorious Jewish teachings that I was learning about and the realities that I was seeing in my synagogue and Jewish community. Jews have been chosen to be God's servants, a light unto the nations and a holy people, descendants of the prophets, the original champions of social justice. Why, then, was there so much complacency in the face of so many critical problems? Why so few dreams of a better world through the application of Jewish teachings?

I saw great potential for applying the values I was reading about in Jewish texts to the real world around us. I wanted to help revitalize my religion, to harness it to help save our imperiled planet. My reaction to the Judaism of the time is summed up in the following paragraph from one of my articles for the synagogue newsletter:

It is generally not religious values that dominate in churches and synagogues today, but rather materialistic, middle-class values. The problem is that far too few people (perhaps including myself) take God and religious teachings seriously enough. If we did, would we fail to protest against the destruction of the precious planet that God has given us as our home? Would we be so apathetic while an estimated 20 million people die of hunger and its effects annually (when God has provided sufficient food for every person on earth), and additional millions suffer from poverty and a lack of shelter, clean water, and other necessities, while hundreds of billions of dollars are spent creating newer and better ways to wage war? If a person took God and religious values seriously, he or she would be among the greatest critics of present society, where religious values are generally given lip service, at best. She or he would be among the greatest champions of peace and justice.

Unfortunately, these editorials were like crying into the wilderness. Nobody appeared to be listening. I felt as if I were tilting at windmills, engaging in a quixotic quest for “The Impossible Dream.” This book is my latest attempt to turn these dreams into practical realities.

\* \* \*

The “Mathematics and the Environment” course had another profound effect on my life: It set me on the road toward vegetarianism. Up until 1978, I was a typical American “meat and potatoes” eater. My mother would be sure to prepare my favorite dish — pot roast — whenever I came to visit with my wife and children. It was a family tradition that I would be served a turkey “drumstick” every Thanksgiving. And yet, I not only became a vegetarian, but also now devote a major part of my time to writing, speaking, and teaching about the benefits of vegetarianism. What caused this major change?

While reviewing material on world hunger for my “Mathematics and the Environment” course in the 1970s, I became increasingly aware of the tremendous waste of grain that results from the production of beef. Over 70 percent of the grain produced in the United States and about 40 percent of the grain produced worldwide is fed to animals destined for slaughter, while millions of people — many of them children — die of hunger and its effects annually. In spite of my own eating habits, I often led class discussions on the possibility of reducing meat consumption as a way of helping hungry people. After several semesters of this, I listened to my own advice and gave up eating red meat, while continuing to eat chicken and fish.

I then began to read about the many health benefits of vegetarianism and about the horrible living conditions of animals raised on factory farms. As a result, I was increasingly attracted to the vegetarian way of life. I was very fortunate to take a course on “Judaism and Vegetarianism” at Lincoln Square Synagogue (LSS) in Manhattan taught by Jonathan Wolf, founder and first president of Jewish Vegetarians of North America. I learned many things and gained much insight from him. We became good friends, and Jonathan has provided

valuable advice and editing skills for my Judaic writings.

I also became fully involved in the community of activists and scholars centered around Wolf's activities: his classes at LSS; his famous vegetarian apartment on Riverside Drive, which hosted hundreds of Shabbatons, Seders, holiday celebrations, political gatherings, and fundraisers; and the Community Action Department at LSS, which he and the synagogue's rabbi, Saul Berman, created. This department featured 15 different active issues committees, addressing every area of Jewish, local, Israeli, and world communal need and crisis.

On January 1, 1978, I decided to join the International Jewish Vegetarian Society. The membership form offered two choices: (1) practicing vegetarian (one who refrains from eating any flesh); or (2) non-vegetarian (one who is in sympathy with the movement, but not yet a vegetarian). I decided to become a full practicing vegetarian. I checked that box on the form, and ever since that moment I have avoided eating any meat, fowl, or fish. In 2000, I became a vegan, abstaining from using any animal products as much as possible, except those employed for religious purposes to make such ritual objects as Torah scrolls, mezzuzot, and tefillin.<sup>2</sup>

Following that decision in 1978, I learned a great deal more about vegetarianism's connections to health, nutrition, ecology, and animal welfare. Plus, I began wondering about the deeper connections between my vegetarianism and Judaism. I learned that the first biblical dietary regimen (Genesis 1:29) was strictly vegetarian, and that the future age of world peace and harmony, the Messianic period, will also be a vegetarian time. I soon became convinced that there are important Jewish mandates to preserve our health, be kind to animals, protect the environment, conserve natural resources, share with hungry people, seek and pursue peace — all of which point to vegetarianism as the ideal diet for Jews. To get this message out to a wider audience, I wrote a book, *Judaism and Vegetarianism*, which was first published in 1982, with revised and expanded editions published in 1988 and 2001.

The more I have learned about the wastefulness of meat production, the negative health effects of animal-based diets, and the cruelties of factory farms — and their inconsistencies with Jewish values — the more I have come to see a switch

toward vegetarianism as not only a personal choice, but a societal and a Jewish imperative. Reducing meat consumption is an essential component in the solution of many national and global problems, as well as an important symbolic religious move toward the peaceable kingdom envisioned by the prophets.

In recent years, I have been devoting considerable time and energy toward making others aware of the importance of switching toward vegetarian diets, both for themselves and for the world. I have:

- Appeared on over 100 radio and cable television programs;
- Published many letters and several op-ed articles in a variety of publications;
- Spoken frequently at conferences and meetings;
- Given dozens of talks and met with four Chief Rabbis and other religious and political leaders in Israel, while visiting my two daughters and their families.

**In addition:**

- As president of the Jewish Vegetarians of North America (JVNA), I produce and send out an e-mail newsletter, and I have over 150 articles, 25 podcasts of my talks and articles, and the complete texts of my other Judaica books at <http://jewishveg.com/Schwartz>.
- In 1987, I was selected as “Jewish Vegetarian of the Year” by the JVNA.
- In 2005, I was inducted into the “Hall of Fame” of the North American Vegetarian Society.
- I am also president of the Society of Ethical and Religious Vegetarians (SERV), an interreligious group dedicated to spreading vegetarian messages in many religious communities,

- I serve as director of Veg Climate Alliance, a group dedicated to spreading awareness that a major shift to plant-based diets is essential to avoid an impending climate catastrophe.
- I also helped produce and appear in the documentary *A Sacred Duty: Applying Jewish Values to Help Heal the World*, which premiered in Jerusalem in November 2007.<sup>3</sup>

Because the issues are so important and the threats are so great, JVNA given out over 35,000 complimentary copies of the *Sacred Duty* DVD and made it freely available on YouTube. It was produced as a labor of love and dedication, with no professional fee being received, by multi-award winning producer, director, writer, and cinematographer Lionel Friedberg, along with his wife Diana, a professional film editor. The documentary has been acclaimed by Jews, Christians, and others and has had a significant impact.

\* \* \*

As I reflect on all of the above, I am so thankful that I have been blessed by God to have been able to make at least a small difference in trying to help produce a better world. Of course there is much more that needs to be done, and I hope to be able to devote much of the time that I will be granted by God to continuing the struggle. I hope that this volume will help inspire many others, especially young people, to work in the struggle to shift our very imperiled planet to a healthier, more just, peaceful, more humane, environmentally sustainable path.

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#### **Notes for Appendix A**

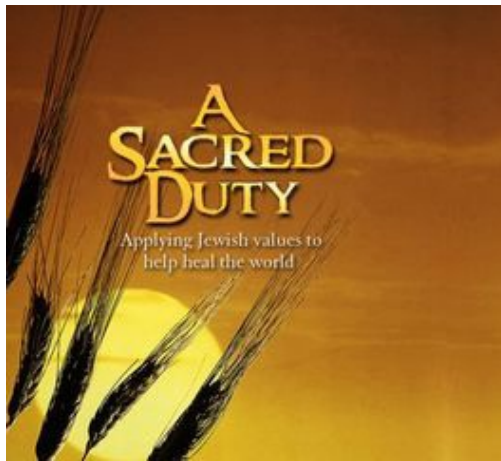
<sup>1</sup> Heschel, *The Insecurity of Freedom*, 1,2

<sup>2</sup> The use of these traditional ritual objects, which are made from leather and/or parchment, creates a strong dilemma for Jews who want to be completely vegan. Some choose not to use them at all. Others make an exception in these particular cases. Still others have sought out items made from the hides of animals that died naturally (there is no

requirement for them to be ritually slaughtered, only that they be from kosher species.)

My personal stance on this issue is that, as indicated several times in this book, I think that Judaism is a wonderful religion with powerful messages that can help create a far better world. But, as with all religions there are aspects that we would prefer that were different. I feel that by being a vegan except when it comes to the use of some ritual objects, one is doing a tremendous amount of good. So, rather than rejecting some important Jewish teachings and traditions, I do use these animal-based ritual objects, but I also strongly stress that for *hiddur mitzvah* (enhancement of a mitzvah), it is best to produce these items from animals who were well treated and died a natural death. When this is done, it is, in a sense, a form of recycling.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.asacredduty.com/> for more info, reviews, and a link to view the film on YouTube. JVNA has also granted to the public the right to reproduce and/or distribute the film without royalties.



DVD cover of “A Sacred Duty:  
Applying Jewish values to help heal the world”

## **Appendix B**

### **A Voice in the Wilderness**

**By Yonassan Gershom**

*Do not despise any person, and do not consider anything impossible, for there is no person who does not have his hour and no thing that does not have its place.*

— Rabbi Ben Azai (Pirkei Avot 4:3)

*Who is wise? He who learns from all people... Who is rich? The one who appreciates what he has.*

— Rabbi Ben Zoma (Pirkei Avot 4:1)

I grew up as an urban nomad. Born in 1947 in Berkeley, California, I attended five different schools on both Coasts and the Midwest before I had reached the fifth grade. I was always the new kid on the block, never in one place long enough to develop any real friendships. On top of this, my mother suffered from a form of mental illness and was unable to give me the love that every child craves. My father was more supportive, but he was often away on long business trips. So, from a very early age, I walked the path of life alone. Then again, doesn't everybody?

It has been said that if God gives us a burden, then we also receive a gift. Looking back, I can credit my isolated childhood with having forced me to go inward at a very early age. In some spiritual traditions, the budding mystic seeks solitude in the forest or on the mountaintop. For me, the "lonely crowd" became my hermit's cave. I turned to God for solace, and developed a deep rapport with God's creation. Animals, both domestic and wild, became a source of love and affection.

By junior high I had grown into the quintessential nerd, an intellectual "egghead" who preferred books to people. People, I had painfully learned, were like ships passing in the night, often taking potshots as they went by. Books, on the other hand, were steadfast companions who carried me to exotic worlds of the imagination.

Had I been born into a Hasidic family, my love of books would no doubt have been channeled into Torah learning. But, like most Americans in my over-60 age group, I went to public school and grew up in a basically secular environment. I did not become an observant Jew until much later.

Even if my working-class family could have afforded a private school, it is highly doubtful that I would have flourished in a yeshiva setting. I would never have been able to concentrate in a classroom where dozens of Talmudic debates were taking place all at once. To my ears, all the conversations in a room would be mixed together into an unintelligible mishmash. In an attempt to concentrate, I would either become overly loud in conversation, or spaced out from audio overload — neither of which are conducive to any kind of social interaction. Even in secular school, I had great difficulty concentrating in class.

Not until my mid-30s would I finally have a diagnosis for this inability to focus among audial distractions: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). In my late 50s I was redefined as having Asperger's Syndrome, a form of high-functioning autism. So the "problem" I struggled with all my life was finally identified by modern science. The term "attention deficit" is misleading, however, because my brain is not deficient. It simply processes information differently. Sometimes this is a handicap, but more often it is a source of creativity. It forces me to think outside the box.



There are those among my Orthodox Jewish brethren who will read this far and say to themselves, "Why should I bother with this guy? He's tainted by the secular world and he's a social misfit besides. What can he possibly tell me about Torah?"

To them I would reply that there are as many different ways of learning Torah as there are Jews. Are we not told that each word of Torah has 70 meanings? Are we not told that every Jew is like a unique letter of the Torah, and that *every single letter* is needed to make up the whole people? Without my special "letter" — as eccentric or useless as it may seem to some people — the Jewish community would be incomplete. From me you won't learn a lot of Gemara, but if you are willing to set aside your preconceptions, you just might gain a few insights into the inner meanings of our stories. And it is through its stories that the soul of a people lives.

In past centuries, Jewish tradition placed a great deal of stress on memorizing Torah texts, for the simple reason that books were handwritten and expensive. Not to mention that antisemites were always burning them. So, the Jewish academies actively sought out people with eidetic memories. The best of them could pass a pin through a volume of Talmud and tell you exactly which words it had pierced. Even better was the scholar who could mentally scan the texts like a computer, pulling up references in several "windows" at once. To do so was a sign of genius.

But times change. As Isaac Asimov once wrote, "It used to be Latin that was the mark of intelligence, and now it is science. I am the beneficiary. I know no Latin except for what my flypaper mind has managed to pick up accidentally -- so without changing a single brain cell, I would be dumb in 1775 and terribly smart in 1975."<sup>1</sup> The point being, that "intelligence" is often defined by what a culture values.

My own IQ is quite high by current testing standards. I said my first word at nine months of age, could read before I got to kindergarten, and by fifth grade was devouring college-level biology books. (My father was always deeply disappointed that I did not become a scientist.) I can think, analyze, do library research, and comprehend complex theories. By that measure, I'm a genius. But in recent years, there has been a shift away

from stressing IQ toward stressing EQ — Emotional Quotient. It's not what you know anymore. It's how well you can fit in and conform to the social structure of the corporate environment — something I was never very good at. So, without changing a single brain cell, the EQ movement has rendered me a complete idiot. Which only goes to prove my point: intelligence and learning are relative concepts.

Dr. Temple Grandin, Ph.D., the best-selling author and animal scientist<sup>2</sup> who is also autistic, wrote: "After all, the really social people did not invent the first stone spear. It was probably invented by an Aspie who chipped away at rocks while the other people socialized around the campfire. Without autism traits we might still be living in caves."<sup>3</sup> We Aspies might not mix very well, but we can often be highly focused innovators. I would have been the guy chipping rocks.

So we must ask ourselves: Is book learning the only measure of Torah knowledge? Or are there lessons that can only be learned through "getting your hands dirty" with practical experience? Have our modern yeshivas become so focused on learning texts that they miss the beauty of God's creation?

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of Hasidism, was said to have been a rather poor student. He was always wandering off into the forest instead of sitting in the classroom all day. Orphaned at an early age, he was a lonely and friendless youth, living off a meager subsidy from the town and a variety of odd jobs. Historians debate whether he actually knew the Hebrew texts, or simply preached on what he picked up orally. Others question whether he was ever ordained as a rabbi. Elie Wiesel writes in *Souls on Fire*: "Some sources claim he was a saint who fled the limelight; others describe him as a harmless dunce; still others endow him with enough learning and wisdom to make him a judge of the rabbinical court."<sup>4</sup> We have many scholarly books written about him, but nothing that he actually wrote himself.

The Chabad Hasidim claim that the Baal Shem Tov was indeed a great Torah scholar, and get annoyed when people portray him as "that guy living out in the woods." Then again, Chabadniks pride themselves on being the intellectual branch of Hasidism. As such, they would be embarrassed to admit that

the founder of Hasidism might have been an unlettered nature lover who spent his early years wandering alone in the Carpathian Mountains.

I, on the other hand, immediately took his story to heart. There are strong similarities between his childhood and mine. Both of us went through early traumas and grew up as outliers. Both of us had difficulty learning by the usual methods. And both of us came to God through interacting with Our Creator's magnificent creation.

\* \* \*

Back in high school during the early 1960s, I had not yet heard of the Baal Shem Tov. My favorite role model then was Henry David Thoreau. In tenth grade we read his book, *Walden*, as part of the curriculum, and a whole new world opened up for me. Here was a rugged individualist much like myself, who "marched to a different drummer" and found joy in the beauty of the natural world. He also understood solitude. "What sort of space is that," Thoreau asked, "which separates a man from his fellows and makes him solitary? I have found that no exertion of the legs can bring two minds much nearer to one another." Well said!

I embraced Thoreau's philosophy of voluntary simplicity (to this day I have little regard for society's status symbols), and longed to live in the woods as he had done. Part of that fantasy was fulfilled through hiking, campcraft and nature study.

Appended to my copy of *Walden* was Thoreau's famous essay, "Civil Disobedience." That laid the groundwork for my involvement in the anti-war movement. In the fall of 1966, I went to college and jumped head first into political activism. The local YMCA had a basement coffeehouse, where I read my protest poetry, listened to local folksingers, and met interesting people from across the country. I missed out on Woodstock, but did ride a bus to Washington D.C., where I held hands and sang "give peace a chance" with a quarter of a million flower children. Those were idealistic times, when we all believed that a new age of peace and love was just around the corner. Although it has been a struggle sometimes to keep my idealism, I have never given up hope for a better world. To this day, I

remain a peacemonger and a pacifist.

\* \* \*

In 1969, through a long series of events that are not relevant here, I landed in South Dakota. There I met the late John Fire Lane Deer, an elderly Lakota *wichasha wakan* (holy man), who lived on the Rosebud Sioux Reservation. I was immediately drawn to him as a possible guide to my spiritual life. So, following the prescribed protocol, I brought the traditional gift of tobacco and requested to study under him. But Lane Deer did not accept me as a disciple. He affirmed my sensitivity to nature and my rapport with animals, and even said that the suffering in my life had served as a personal purification. Nevertheless, he did not feel that the Indian way was to be my path.

"You could learn the Indian way," Lane Deer explained, "because the earth is here for all of us. We all walk on the same land under the same sky. But your soul is Jewish, not Indian. Wakantanka, the Great Mystery, gave to each people the way He wants them to worship. To us Indians He gave the Sacred Pipe, and to your people He gave the Bible. Go back to your own people and serve the Creator through that path."

I was shocked! "But Lane Deer," I replied, "you are sending me back to the White Man's suburbia, to the same materialistic society you so often condemn! How can you expect me to find the Spirit there?"

He closed his eyes and was silent for a long time. Then he looked at me and said, "Your people once had these same teachings, but they have forgotten them. Find the traditional teachers who still remember the old ways and learn from them. Then your soul will be fulfilled."

I was skeptical. Nowhere in modern Jewish circles had I ever encountered a spirituality such as the Indians had shown me. Nor was I alone in this alienation. Many Jews of my generation felt the same emptiness within their own tradition. During the post-World War II period, spirituality took a back seat in America. Jews were angry at God for supposedly "doing nothing" during the Holocaust. So they turned their attention toward building the state of Israel instead, as well as new

synagogues and community centers. It was almost as if, having witnessed the total destruction of an entire civilization in Europe, they felt driven to build solid, imposing structures in America. If some synagogues of that era remind us of mausoleums, perhaps they are. Loving monuments to six million lost relatives.

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach once explained the lack of spirituality this way: During the formative years of the Baby Boom generation, the Jewish community was in such deep mourning over the tragedy of the Holocaust that there was no joy left in our spiritual house. That was why, Reb Shlomo said, so many Jews were going to other religions in the 1960s and 70s. They went where joy still flourished, and would someday bring that joy back to Judaism.

And so it eventually proved to be with me. But in 1969 I had no such historical perspective. I only knew that organized religion seemed like an empty cup, ornate and beautifully jeweled perhaps, but devoid of any meaningful content. Among the Native Americans I had learned to "see with the eye of the heart." How could I go back to the superficialities of suburbia?

\* \* \*

In 1973, I returned to college. That same year, someone sent me the newly published *Jewish Catalog*, a do-it-yourself manual for everything from tying your own *tzitzit* (ritual tassels) to making kosher wine. At the end of the book was an essay by Reb Zalman Schachter, entitled "The First Step." This brief collection of hands-on instructions for developing Jewish spirituality became my daily routine. I traded my hippie beads for a yarmulke, and, within a year, had become an observant Jew.

While cutting off my long hair, I decided to leave the *payos* (side curls), which I jokingly referred to as the "Jewish tribal haircut." Among Native peoples, hair is a very important part of one's identity. To this day, I feel that my side curls represent a physical sign of dedication to the spiritual path.

Not long after receiving the *Jewish Catalog*, I discovered *Souls on Fire* by Elie Wiesel. First published in 1972, this book contains stories about several Hasidic masters, as told to Wiesel

by his Hasidic grandfather. Here were the very teachings that Lame Deer had told me to seek out! I have no idea how an old medicine man from the South Dakota prairie had intuited the existence of stories that were lost to most American Jews. But intuit them he did, and pointed the way for me to find them.

*Souls on Fire* is not an academic tome about Hasidism. Rather, it's a family collection of stories that Elie heard as a child on his grandfather's knee. He, in turn, heard them from his grandfather — which takes us back over a century. And clearly, those storytelling grandfathers were gentle, spiritual men whose humanity shines on every page. "There will, of course, always be someone to tell you that a certain tale cannot, could not, be objectively true," Elie's grandfather explained. "That is of no importance; an objective Hasid is not a Hasid."<sup>5</sup> If he were alive today, Wiesel's grandfather would probably say that storytelling is a right-brain experience.

*Souls on Fire* led me to many English translations of Hasidic stories and kabbalistic texts, most of which were being newly published at the time. During the 1970s, a lot of people were earning their doctorates by translating these source materials. There was a strong sense of urgency to this work, an understanding that if these stories were not collected and preserved right now, they would be lost forever, as was the pre-Holocaust world that had produced them.

I now rejoiced in the tales of Isaac Luria, the sixteenth-century rabbi who knew the language of the animals and could read a seeker's past incarnations. I delighted in stories about the Baal Shem Tov, who wandered alone in the mountains and received his teachings through the spirit of Ahiyah the Shilonite, the same teacher who had initiated Elijah the Prophet. I sighed with happiness when I discovered Rebbe Nachman of Breslov's solitary meditations in the forest. These were not mere stories — they were windows into an alternate universe! At times I could swear that the souls of Hasidic Rebbes were looking over my shoulder as I read. Fantasy? Perhaps. But the concepts in the books were so familiar that I just "knew" them intuitively. I felt as if I were remembering something long forgotten.

The year was 1976. I had completed my Bachelor of Science degree and was living in Minneapolis. That summer, I found a used book on Breslov Hasidism at a garage sale. Best 25 cents I ever spent! The book, whose author was not named, was published by a yeshiva in Brooklyn and described a technique called *hisboddidus* (literally "make oneself be in solitude.") This consisted of a spontaneous free-flowing, stream-of-consciousness form of personal prayer. The best place to do this, according to the Breslover Rebbe, was in a field or forest. I had been doing this same type of thing all my life, but it was reassuring to discover that there was a legitimate Jewish form of outdoor meditation.

That same year, I ran into a group of Lubavitcher Hasidim who had erected a sukkah booth on Nicollet Mall in Minneapolis. Up to that point, I knew of Hasidism mostly from books. This was my first real contact with a living community. In those days, the Lubavitcher Rebbe was not so right wing politically, nor were his disciples claiming him to be the Messiah. The mood was more contemplative. For a while, I thought I might fit into Lubavitch. I began spending Sabbaths and holy days with them. We would eventually part ways over politics, but I still have good memories of my experiences there. Never before had I danced with such ecstasy on Simchat Torah!

At the same time, I was deeply disappointed that these 20th-century Hasidim no longer had any real connection to nature. They actually considered me strange for spending time alone in the woods, and were suspicious of my need for solitude. When I brought up Rebbe Nachman's meditation techniques, they changed the subject.

The Lubavitchers always hurried everywhere, oblivious to any trees or flowers along the way. The sidewalk was merely a way to get from one building to another. If I pointed out a bird or a butterfly, they glanced with little interest. Nor did they keep pets or otherwise interact with animals, except perhaps for a *kappores* chicken to be slaughtered before Yom Kippur. In short, there was no sense of the mystical connection with God's creation that I had read about in the old stories. It had all been urbanized away. I continued to dance there on the holy days, but became frustrated with their form of Hasidism.

Around the same time I was dancing with the Lubavitchers, I met Rabbi Moshe Adler, a Modern Orthodox rabbi with a strong Hasidic bent, who was the Hillel director at the University of Minnesota at that time. He was also a liberal political activist. For four wonderful years — rain, shine, or snow — I walked two miles through the city to his home on Shabbos morning for davening and learning.

Reb Moshe's specialty was Midrash, the oral tradition that expands our understanding of the text through stories, parables and metaphors. He was a true master of this genre. From him, I learned how to integrate the biblical stories with the inner world of the heart, and then put the teachings into positive action. Not only were Abraham and Sarah historical figures, they were also archetypes and role models, whose lives were directly related to my own consciousness. By the end of those four years, Reb Moshe had taught me how to read a Jewish text in ways that made the characters come alive.

My future wife, Caryl, was also studying with Reb Moshe at the time. We were married in the summer of 1980, in a folksy grassroots ceremony in Powderhorn Park. The experience at Hillel continued to have a strong influence as we built a home together. It was also at Hillel that I finally came face-to-face with Rabbi Zalman Schachter, whose "First Step" manual I had been using for seven years now. Rabbi Adler had invited him to be the keynote speaker at a Sabbath retreat. At the time, Reb Zalman was attempting to found a semi-monastic contemplative "Order of B'nai Or" (Children of Light), a sort of Jewish ashram inspired by the Essene writings discovered at Qumran. The idea greatly appealed to Caryl and me. In 1982, we moved to Philadelphia and spent a year living at the old B'nai Or House on Emlen Street, where I entered his rabbinical program.<sup>6</sup>

I learned a great deal about Hasidism and kabbalah there, but what I remember most are the stories that Reb Zalman told around the table. He gave a living voice to the tales I had been reading. Much of my own storytelling style is based on what I heard from him. But the contemplative community he had envisioned did not materialize. In 1983, Reb Zalman blessed Caryl and me to return to Minneapolis and teach what we had learned. We began holding our own B'nai Or-style services and



gatherings, including the first Tu B'Shevat Seder ever held in that city. Our goal was to create a holistic community that was Orthodox in observance but also activist in terms of peace and justice.

It was not to be. Two years later, when I returned to Pennsylvania for the first national B'nai Or gathering, everything had changed, and I became increasingly alienated as the week wore on. It was clear that the movement Reb Zalman had founded was no longer Hasidic nor was it even Orthodox, although it was still activist. As it turned out, this was the last gathering to be billed as "B'nai Or," and the last I ever attended. Reb Zalman and I remained friends, however. I continued to study under him through correspondence. In 1986 he ordained me in the presence of my Twin Cities community, during a Purim program at Mt. Zion Temple in St. Paul.

This was not the joke it might have seemed, to be ordained on the Jewish version of the Feast of Fools. My Native friends have said that I am like a sacred clown, a *heyoka*, a type of "crazy wisdom" holy man. I saw my role as one of breaking through the stuffiness of the Judaism of that time. The Hippie Hasidic Street Rebbe, some people called me back then. Among the four people who held our wedding canopy was a homeless man whose name I have forgotten, but whose face is forever preserved in our wedding album. Who knows? He could have been Elijah in disguise. So it was to honor my "crazy wisdom" path that Reb Zalman ordained me at Purim time. The Holocaust had driven our joy away. It took a few clowns like Reb Zalman and me to bring it back.

\* \* \*

Later in 1986, tragedy struck our family in the form of illness. Caryl had developed multiple chemical sensitivities, also known as "environmental illness," which caused her to have severe allergic reactions to many common substances. Exhaust fumes, burning candles, perfume and scented soaps — all of these became poison to her system, bringing on mood swings, mental confusion, and constantly aching muscles.

None of the physicians we consulted at the time had any answers. Most dismissed the problem as psychosomatic.

Clinical ecology, the current field of medicine that deals with multiple chemical sensitivities, was still in its infancy. It was not even a recognized medical field in Minnesota. But even if it had been available, we could never have afforded the treatments because they were still experimental and not covered by insurance. So in 1988, acting on instinct alone, we took the only option open to us: we moved to a rural area without smog.

The social adjustment was extremely difficult. Gone were the monthly storytelling gatherings at our home and the endless stream of Shabbat guests. We became token Jews in a rural Christian town. As the years passed, we lost contact with our old friends in the city. The Jewish community, in turn, forgot we even existed. The Lubavitchers took the attitude that, since we had "chosen" to "cut ourselves off from the community" and live in the middle of nowhere, we were on our own.

At first, I cursed Caryl's illness, regarding it as some sort of divine punishment that had exiled us from our people. I often used my *hisboddidus* prayer hour to yell my rage at God. I was angry and hurt that, after giving so much of my life to His service, I was now a forgotten outcast. But gradually I came to realize that our sojourn in the wilderness might be a blessing in disguise. Maybe even an answer to my prayers. Years ago I had wanted to be like Thoreau, living in the forest. Now God had apparently decreed that I should follow my "different drummer" into the Great North Woods. Here, too, I could practice the daily forest meditation prescribed by Rebbe Nachman of Breslov in complete solitude.

In 1989, Caryl and I declared ourselves Breslover Hasidim, and in 1997 I went on the Rosh Hashanah pilgrimage to Rebbe Nachman's grave in Uman, Ukraine. I was utterly amazed at how rural it was. I had always been told that Jews were urban people, that we had been locked in ghettos where we never saw the sky or a living tree. In parts of medieval Europe that was true. But not in Ukraine. Rebbe Nachman had lived in the country, just like me. And his Hasidim, unlike the Lubavitchers, never criticized me for living away from the urban community, nor did they shake their heads at my love of nature. "Bloom where you're planted" describes the Breslov attitude. A Jew can serve God anywhere. And sometimes God sends us to remote places for a reason. After all, if Moses had

remained in Egypt, he would never have seen the Burning Bush.

How many rabbis today can bless God for "giving the rooster the knowledge to know day from night" while hearing a live rooster crow? It's one thing to read about how "man and beast" in the city of Nineveh fasted and cried out "mightily" unto God (Jonah 3:8). But to literally hear the deafening clamor of those hungry animals? Can you imagine a whole city full of bleating goats, mooing cows, barking dogs, baa-ing sheep, meowing cats, braying donkeys, neighing horses, honking geese and squawking chickens? Living here in farm country, I know *exactly* what that "mighty noise" would sound like!

If Caryl and I are "afflicted" with isolation from other Jews, then we are also blessed with beautiful surroundings and the time to meditate. At night we can see the Milky Way, and at noon there are sometimes eagles riding the thermals overhead. Our yard is a haven for birds and animals, including the pet roosters who awaken us at dawn.

With the arrival of Internet access in the late 1990s, our Jewish isolation finally ended. Now we could be in daily contact with Jews all over the world. It turned out to be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it is wonderful to find so many Torah resources online. But on the other hand, the Orthodox community itself has changed radically in the past two decades. Politically, everything has shifted to the right. A liberal Orthodox Jew like me is now seen as an oxymoron, if not an actual traitor to Judaism. How did this happen, I asked myself?

I once read somewhere that if you were to take a frog, which is a cold-blooded animal, and put it in cool water, then slowly raise the temperature, the frog will keep adjusting its body temperature until it is literally boiled alive. (Not that I would ever really do this, heaven forbid.) On the other hand, if you throw a frog directly into hot water, it will jump right out. I am like that second frog. I had been away from the community while these political changes were taking place, so I did not adjust to them. When I tried to jump back into the Hasidic community, things were so uncomfortable that I simply could not stay there. So I jumped back out.

And those wonderful, heart-filled stories that inspired me to return to Judaism? They are now disparaged by the Orthodox rabbis as "tainted" with secular academe. The new

"Torah-true" versions are rigid, preachy, and do not lift my spirit.

Somehow, the Hasidism I knew and loved has been sidetracked into the right-wing agenda. Pacifism, once a hallmark of Hasidic thought and practice, is now ridiculed as impractical and outdated. Most Hasidim I've met are not even aware of heroes like Mattisyahu the Penitent, who led a Hasidic non-cooperation movement against the Nazis.<sup>7</sup>

As my good friend Richard Schwartz would say, our religion has been stolen, its core values undermined or forgotten. I say this out of deepest love for Yiddishkeit. "An open rebuke is better than hidden love." (Proverbs 27:5) I feel the same way about Judaism. I rebuke because I care about what is happening to the Yiddishkeit that I love so much. My religion has been stolen from me, and I am on a quest to get it back.

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#### Notes for Appendix B

<sup>1</sup> Asimov, Isaac, "Thinking About Thinking," *Asimov on Science: a 30-year Retrospective*, Windsor Publishing Corp, New York, 1989, p. 259.

<sup>2</sup> Temple Grandin has appeared on the *Today Show*, *Larry King Live*, 48 hours, *ABC's Primetime Live*, and *20/20*. She has been featured in publications such as *Time Magazine*, *People Magazine*, *Forbes*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and the *New York Times*. Her six books include *Thinking in Pictures* and *Animals in Translation: Using the Mysteries of Autism to Decode Animal Behavior*.

<sup>3</sup> From *Thinking in Pictures*, expanded edition.

<sup>4</sup> Wiesel, Elie, *Souls on Fire*, Random House, New York. 1972. p.12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>6</sup> In those days, this was more of an independent study program, patterned on the Old World master-disciple model, although Reb Zalman did insist that his candidates have a college degree to round out their educations. Eventually this program evolved into the more formally structured rabbinical program now offered by the Aleph Alliance for Jewish Renewal.

<sup>7</sup> Prager, Moshe, *Those Who Never Yielded*, Lightbooks, Brooklyn, 1980.

## Appendix C

### Action Ideas – Putting Jewish Values into Practice

The world faces a very dangerous situation today. As Woody Allen cynically put it: “More than any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.” While that dismal view of the world may often seem true, we also have a chance to show that there is another path — a path to a far better world — by truly applying Jewish values to present crises. To help do this, some action suggestions are given below. They are consistent with the Talmudic teaching that “It is not study that is the chief thing, but action.” (Kiddushin 40b)

In attempting to change the world, sometimes we have to start by first changing ourselves. Rabbi Israel Salanter, the founder of the *mussar* (ethics) movement in Lithuania, taught: “First a person should put his house together, then his town, then his world.”

If you feel that global crises are so overwhelming that your efforts will have little effect, then consider the following. Judaism teaches: “You are not obligated to complete the task, but neither are you free to desist from it” (*Pirkei Avot* 2:21). Each of us must make a start and do whatever he or she can to help improve the world. Judaism also teaches that a person is obligated to protest when there is evil and, if necessary, to

proceed from protest to action. Each person is to imagine that the world is evenly balanced between good and evil, and that each good deed tips the whole world toward the side of good. Therefore, her or his actions can determine the destiny of the entire world. Even if little is accomplished right away, the act of trying to make improvements will prevent the hardening of one's heart and will affirm acceptance of an obligation to try to improve conditions. Even the act of consciousness-raising itself is important, because it may lead to future action for change.

In considering how much to become involved, please consider that the world is arguably approaching climate, food, energy, water, and other environmental catastrophes, as well as other threats. Consider how essential it is that major changes soon be made so that future generations will have a decent world in which to live.

### **Here are some things that each person can do:**

1. Become well informed. Learn the facts about current environmental and other societal problems and the applicable Jewish teachings from this and other books (see Bibliography).
2. Check rumors you receive by email against the facts before passing them on to others. [Snopes.com](http://Snopes.com) is an excellent resource for verifying whether or not a particular Internet rumor is a hoax. Remember: Spreading *lashon hara* (evil gossip) is forbidden, and this includes material you receive by email.
3. Help elect candidates whose positions are most consistent with Jewish progressive values and environmental concerns. Join their campaigns and, of course, vote for them.
4. Inform others. Write timely letters to editors of publications. Set up programs and discussions. Become registered with community, library, or school speakers' bureaus. Wear a button. Put bumper stickers where many people will see them. Make and display posters.
5. Simplify your life-style. Conserve energy. Recycle materials. Buy and wear used clothing. Bike or walk whenever

possible, rather than drive, and learn to combine errands on your trips. Share rides. Use mass transit when appropriate.

6. Become a vegetarian, and preferably a vegan, or at least sharply reduce your consumption of animal products. As discussed in Chapter 12, veganism is the diet most consistent with such Jewish values as showing compassion to animals, taking care of one's health, preserving the environment, sharing with hungry people, conserving natural resources, and pursuing peace. Even if you don't feel you can give up meat right now, try having a meatless day each week, when you try new recipes at home, or eat out in a vegetarian restaurant.

7. Work with organizations and groups on some of the significant issues discussed in this book. If your time is limited, then choose one issue that interests you and devote yourself to that. For contact information for Jewish groups working on such issues, see Appendices D and E. If there are no local groups or if you differ with such groups on some important issues, set up a group in your synagogue, Jewish Center, or Hillel.

8. Encourage your public and congregational libraries to order, stock, and circulate books on global issues and Jewish teachings related to them. Donate any duplicate copies. Request that libraries regularly acquire such books. Subscribe to relevant magazines, and, if you can afford it, buy some to donate.

9. Speak or organize events with guest speakers and/or audio-visual presentations on how Jewish values address current critical issues. Consider requesting a complimentary DVD of the documentary film, *A Sacred Duty: Applying Jewish Values to Help Heal the World* at [ASacredDuty.com](http://ASacredDuty.com). Schedule a showing of the film at your synagogue or other organization. Offer it to your local film festival or other arts event.

10. Ask rabbis and other religious leaders to give sermons and/or classes discussing Judaism's teachings on social justice, sustainability, hunger, peace, conservation, and other Jewish values and how they can be applied to current issues.

11. Contact editors of local newspapers and ask that more space be devoted to current threats and on religious teachings related to them. Write articles and letters using information from this book and other books and magazines.

12. Try to influence public policy on the issues discussed in this book. Organize letter-writing campaigns and group visits to politicians to lobby for a safer, saner, more stable world. Run for office if you feel inclined to do so. Members of city councils, school boards, and other local institutions can have a big impact. Think globally, act locally.

13. Consult with rabbis and religious educators and leaders on how to apply to today's critical issues such Jewish mandates as "seek peace and pursue it," "*bal tashchit*" (you shall not waste), "justice, justice shall you pursue," and "love your neighbor as yourself." Ask principals of yeshivas and day schools to see that their curricula reflect traditional Jewish concerns with environmental, peace, and justice issues. Volunteer to speak to classes and to help plan curricula.

14. As an outgrowth of Jewish teachings on helping feed hungry people and conserving resources, work to end the tremendous amount of waste associated with many Jewish organizational functions and celebrations:

- Encourage friends and institutions to simplify, reduce wastefulness, and serve less lavish celebratory feasts. Put this into practice at your own celebrations.
- Request that meat not be served, since the production of meat wastes grain, land, and other resources and contributes substantially to pollution, deforestation, desertification, loss of biodiversity, and climate change. Refraining from eating meat also expresses identification with the millions of people who lack an adequate diet, as



well as the billions of farmed animals slaughtered each year.

- Reclaim left over edible food from *simchas* to donate to shelters and food kitchens. Recommend to people hosting a celebration that they donate a portion of the cost of the event to Mazon (an organization discussed in Appendix D) or another group working to reduce hunger.

15. Start a community garden, or participate in one already established. As much as possible, buy your food from local farmers' markets. Volunteer at a homeless shelter or food shelf program. Encourage your children to go with you, so they develop the habit of caring for others less fortunate than themselves.

16. Help set up a committee to analyze and reduce energy consumption in your synagogue. Apply steps taken to reduce synagogue energy use as a model for similar action on other buildings and homes in the community.

17. Set up a social action committee at your synagogue, temple, Jewish Center, day or afternoon school, or campus, to help people get more involved in educational and action-centered activities. Build coalitions with other social justice groups in your community.

18. Raise the consciousness of your synagogue and other local Jewish organizations and individuals about how Jewish teachings can be applied to respond to current societal problems. Ask respectful but challenging questions such as those discussed in Chapter 15.



## Appendix D

### Orthodox Jewish Activist Groups

Because I have been critical of the Orthodox community for not doing enough to respond to many of today's crises, I also wish to give credit to those who do respond. This appendix spotlights a sampling of Orthodox Jewish groups that *are* doing very positive things on environmental, social justice, peace, and other activist issues. I believe that the groups discussed here are role models and I hope that learning about them will inspire many people to follow in their footsteps.

Please note: Although I often refer to "the Orthodox community" as a whole, readers should be aware that Orthodox Judaism is not a monolithic "denomination." Within Orthodoxy there are many different subgroups, each with its own particular "flavor" and approach to Judaism. Inclusion on this list does not necessarily mean that I endorse or agree with everything that a particular group advocates or believes. It is possible, for example, for an organization to be liberal in one area and very conservative in another. You can get more information about each of the groups by visiting their websites.

#### Orthodox social action and educational groups

**Areyvut** aims to infuse the lives of Jewish youth and teenagers with the core Jewish values of *chesed* (kindness) *tzedakah* (charity) and *tikkun olam* (social action). Areyvut offers Jewish day schools, congregational schools, synagogues, community

centers and families a variety of opportunities to empower and enrich their youth by creating innovative programs that make these core Jewish values real and meaningful to them. The group's activities are also discussed in chapter 14.

(<http://www.aryvut.org/>)

**Canfei Nesharim (Wings of Eagles)** connects traditional Jewish texts with contemporary scientific findings. It educates and empowers Jewish individuals, organizations, and communities to take active roles in protecting the environment, in order to build a more sustainable world, Inspired by Torah teachings. ([www.canfeinesharim.org](http://www.canfeinesharim.org)) One of Canfei Nesharim's special projects is **Jewcology**, a web-based portal for networking and resource sharing among Jewish environmentalists worldwide. The long-term goal of this collaborative project is to build a multi-denominational, multi-generational, regionally diverse community of Jewish environmental activists who are learning from one another and from an expanding set of Jewish-environmental resources how to educate their communities about the Jewish responsibility to protect the environment. (<http://www.jewcology.com/>)

**Edah** was a Modern Orthodox Jewish organization from 1996 to 2006 that was generally associated with the liberal wing of Orthodox Judaism in the United States. It was “committed to modern Orthodoxy, which maintains a serious devotion to Torah and *halachah* while enjoying a mutually enriching relationship with the modern world.” It was formed to create a renewed modern Orthodoxy that would be involved with society while passionately committed to Jewish Law.

**Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals** fosters an appreciation of legitimate diversity within Orthodoxy. “It wishes to create an Orthodox Jewish life that is intellectually alive, creative, inclusive, open to responsible discussion and diverse opinions, active in the general Jewish community, and in society as a whole, engaged in serious and sophisticated Jewish education for children and adults, committed to addressing the *halakhic* and philosophic problems of our times, drawing on the wisdom and experience of diverse Jewish communities throughout

history.” (<http://www.jewishideas.org/>)

**Open House** in Ramle was founded in 1991 to improve relations among Israeli Arabs and Jews, and has remained active without interruption, despite outbursts of violence and the ongoing climate of fear. It is located in what was originally a Palestinian Muslim family’s home, later inhabited and owned by an Israeli Jewish family. (See Sandy Tolan’s book *The Lemon Tree* for the background story). The house and garden symbolize the homeland of two peoples that are still trying to forge a just and lasting peace between them. Open House has two program areas: a Center for the Development of the Arab Child, sponsoring affirmative action programs for Arab toddlers and youth, and a Center for Jewish-Arab Coexistence and Reconciliation, which runs various joint activities, including summer Peace Camps, youth leadership training, and mixed delegations to Europe and the United States.

(<http://www.friendsofopenhouse.org/>)

**Oz v’Shalom/Netivot Shalom** is a group of Orthodox Israelis dedicated to seeking a two-state solution of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and educating Israelis and others about Jewish teachings on peace and justice. The group is discussed in detail in chapter 6. ([www.netivot-shalom.org.il/](http://www.netivot-shalom.org.il/))

**Tevel B’Tzedek (The Earth — in Justice)**, founded by Rabbi Micha Odenheimer, is an Israel based non-profit organization promoting social and environmental justice. Its mission is to create a community of Israeli and Diaspora Jews engaging in the urgent issues of global poverty, marginalization and environmental devastation based on a deep commitment to the Jewish people and its ethical and spiritual traditions.

([www.tevelbtzedek.org/](http://www.tevelbtzedek.org/))

**Uri L’Tzedek** is an Orthodox social justice organization guided by Torah values and dedicated to combating suffering and oppression. Through community based education, leadership development and action, Uri L’Tzedek creates discourse, inspires leaders, and empowers the Jewish community towards creating a more just world. The group organizes many events to

educate people about Judaism's powerful message on social justice issues. (<http://www.utzedek.org/>)

**Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (YCT)** is a rabbinical school whose leaders believe that “the future of Orthodoxy depends on our becoming a movement that expands outward non-dogmatically and cooperatively to encompass the needs of the larger Jewish community and the world. “For this vision to succeed, we require a new breed of leaders — rabbis who are open, non-judgmental, knowledgeable, empathetic, and eager to transform Orthodoxy into a movement that meaningfully and respectfully interacts with all Jews, regardless of affiliation, commitment, or background.” They strive to create future rabbis with “a love of Torah, a philosophy of inclusiveness, and a passion for leadership.” ([www.yct Torah.org/](http://www.yct Torah.org/))

### **Orthodox groups helping the poor and needy**

The following, in alphabetical order, is a sampling of Orthodox Jewish groups that are involved with helping sick and needy people and performing other charitable acts. As with the other activist lists in the appendices, not everything of importance about each group is included, and some very worthy groups are not listed below because of space considerations. Much of the information from the groups is from their websites.

**Aleph Institute** is the Chabad outreach organization for helping Jewish prisoners and their families. “We take *care* no matter *where*.” Aleph has created and implemented a host of highly acclaimed programs for Jews who are isolated due to incarceration. They provide books, calendars and ritual items such as tallit and tefillin, etc. Chabad rabbis also visit and correspond with inmates, and work with prison chaplains to advocate for prisoner's religious rights. (<http://www.aleph-institute.org/>)

**Bema'aglei Tzedek (Circles of Justice)** is working to empower young Israelis to apply Jewish values in becoming powerful agents of social change. They use creative educational tools and social action campaigns to “create a more just Israeli

society, informed and inspired by Jewish values. Among the issues they address are reducing poverty, increasing access for handicapped people, and improving conditions for women. They believe in the importance of addressing root causes of Israel's socioeconomic problems and in the power of average Israelis to join together to create a better society, based on Jewish sources.

(<http://www.mtzedek.org.il/english/AboutUs.asp>)

**Bikur Cholim**, "visiting the sick," involves many individuals and groups in Jewish communities providing support and comfort to people who are ill, homebound, isolated, and/or otherwise in distress. *Bikur cholim* can include such activities as: visiting patients in a hospital, rehabilitation center, or nursing home; visiting people who are restricted to their home because of physical or psychological impairment or social isolation; taking people who are ill or impaired to doctor's appointments, on errands or field trips; providing telephone contact and reassurance to those who are ill or homebound.

(<http://www.bikurcholimcc.org/whatisbc.html>)

([www.bikurcholimcc.org/](http://www.bikurcholimcc.org/))

**Chai Lifeline** strives to "bring joy to the lives of its young patients and their families through creative, innovative, and effective family-centered programs, activities, and services... providing unparalleled support throughout the child's illness, recovery, and beyond... offering all services free of charge... embodying the ideals of compassion, kindness, and caring for others inherent in Jewish culture and life."

(<http://www.chailifeline.org/>)

**The Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation** uses innovative methods to promote the Torah's wisdom on human relations and personal development. It uses a vast array of effective communication tools including books, tapes, video seminars, telephone classes, and a newsletter, designed to heighten awareness of such essential values as judging others favorably, speaking with restraint and integrity, and acting with respect and sensitivity. Their programs use Torah values in seeking to build a world of harmony and compassion.

(<http://www.chofetzchaimusa.org/>)

**Friendship Circle** builds friendships between children with special needs and teen volunteers. Their shared experiences empower the children, teach the teens the priceless value of giving, and enrich the lives of all involved. Sponsored by local Lubavitch Centers, it has about 80 locations worldwide.

(<http://www.friendshipcircle.org/>)

**Gemachs**, an abbreviation for *gemilut chasadim*, “acts of kindness,” operate in many Jewish communities to loan gowns and other wedding items for future brides and others, using donations that they receive. Many people have expanded the concept of *gemachs* to include free loans of household items, clothing, books, equipment, services and advice. Some *gemachs* groups loan costumes for Purim. Still others provide interest-free loans, with easy repayment terms. Contact your local Orthodox synagogue for information on a *gemachs* group near you.

**Hatzolah** is the largest volunteer Emergency Medical Services and ambulance provider in the United States, with numerous branches serving communities throughout the United States and the world. It aims to save lives, as well as prevent, reduce, and treat injuries and illness. Hatzolah uses the latest equipment and has well-trained volunteers who respond to emergencies at a moment’s notice. Their efforts have saved many lives. Hatzolah is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and they provide care equally to all who are in need, regardless of religion, race, or any other factors.

(<http://www.hatzolahems.org/>)

**Maot Chitim** provides matzah, wine, and other Passover needs to poor people before the holiday. Their actions are to help fulfill the opening paragraph of the Haggadah recited at the Seder: “All who are hungry, let them come and eat.”

([www.maotchitim.org/](http://www.maotchitim.org/))

**Meir Panim** relief centers in Israel help address the growing poverty crisis in Israel that affects over one and a half million



people across the country. Meir Panim is “committed to provide both immediate and long-term relief to the impoverished of Israel — young and old alike — via its dynamic range of food and social service programs in distressed cities throughout Israel, all aimed at helping the needy with dignity and respect.” In addition to providing immediate assistance, they provide solutions to help poor Israelis break out of the cycle of poverty and become self-sufficient members of Israeli society.

(<http://www.meirpanim.org/>)

**Ohel** provides a wide variety of social services to Jews with a variety of needs. Among their many programs are children and family services, foster care for children who suffer from abuse and neglect, adolescent residential programs, counseling to teenagers and their families on drug, alcohol, gambling, eating disorders, and other addictions, counseling to victims of sexual abuse, providing school-based mental health workshops and other services, and many more. ([www.ohelfamily.org/](http://www.ohelfamily.org/))

**Tomchai Shabbat (Supporters of the Sabbath)** involves several Jewish charities in different communities that provide food and other supplies to poor Jews to help them celebrate the Sabbath and the Jewish holidays. Their programs also help those without work find jobs, start businesses and earn livelihoods. They provide clothing and furniture, assist with utilities and rent in emergency situations, help children obtain Jewish educations and direct those in need to the proper social service organizations.

(<http://www.tomcheishabbos.org/kindness>)

**Yachad**, a group affiliated with the National Council of Synagogue Youth (NCSY), the youth group of the Orthodox Union (OU), is dedicated to addressing the needs of all individuals with disabilities and including them in the Jewish community. Yachad Chapters are located throughout the United States and Canada and they have several inclusive activities per month. (<http://www.njcd.org/>)

## **Appendix E**

### **Additional Jewish Activist Groups**

In addition to the Orthodox groups listed in Appendix D, there are many other activist groups in the wider Jewish community. Listed below are just a few of the Jewish organizations working in a wide variety of areas to improve the world and to involve Jews in changing society. Many of the descriptions below are taken from the groups' web sites, as sometimes indicated by quotation marks. Some of these web sites have links to numerous other groups.

Inclusion of a group in this and the previous appendix does not necessarily mean agreement with every position, action, and statement issued by the group or its representatives. Rather, it means that they are doing some positive things toward a more humane, compassionate, just, peaceful, and environmentally sustainable planet. Conversely, omission from these lists does not necessarily imply disapproval, only limited space considerations. Readers are strongly encouraged to investigate these and other organizations for themselves, and make their own decisions about which ones to support and/or join.

## **1. American Jewish environmental organizations**

**The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL)** uses a network of Jewish institutions, leaders, and other individuals to increase the Jewish community's involvement in environmental stewardship. It strives to educate the Jewish community on environmental issues, promotes conservation and renewable energy sources, and provides a Jewish voice in the environmental community and the broader interfaith community and an environmental voice in the Jewish community. (<http://www.coejl.org/>)

**Green Zionist Alliance** offers a place for people who care about humanity's obligation to preserve the Earth and the special responsibility of the Jewish people to preserve Israel's environment. It works to educate and mobilize people worldwide to protect Israel's environment and support its environmental movement; to improve environmental practices within the World Zionist Organization and its constituent agencies; and to inspire people to work for a sustainable world. (<http://www.greenzionism.org/>)

**Hazon** works to create healthy and sustainable communities in the Jewish world and beyond through supporting the Jewish environmental movement in the U.S. and Israel. They organize Jewish environmental bike rides to raise money for environmental groups in Israel, promote partnerships between synagogues and local farmers, hold annual conferences to consider Jewish teachings on agriculture and diets, and have a website which features discussions of Jewish teachings on food-related issues. (<http://www.hazon.org/>)

**Jewish National Fund (JNF)** for over 100 years worked to improve Israel's environment by planting 240 million trees, building over 210 reservoirs and dams, developing over 250,000 acres of land, creating more than 1,000 parks, providing the infrastructure for over 1,000 communities, and

bringing life to the Negev Desert. They have educated students around the world about Israel and its environment. In the midst of Israel's severest drought, they are working to increase the efficiency of Israel's water use. (<http://www.jnf.org/>)

**Shalom Center** is committed to inspiring the Jewish community to greater awareness and involvement on issues of peace and justice for the planet and all its inhabitants. Working with peace and justice advocates of all faiths, it promotes activities related to Jewish holidays and other occasions to increase awareness of threats from "global scorching" and the importance of a sane energy policy. (<http://www.shalomctr.org/>)

**Teva Learning Center** partners with Jewish day schools, congregational schools, synagogues, camps, and youth groups to educate Jews about nature and Jewish environmental teachings. Teva's programs, most of which occur at Surprise Lake Camp in the picturesque mountains at Cold Spring, New York, stress experiential learning to advance the skills of environmental educators, and increase the awareness of Jewish youth. They touch the lives of 6,000 participants annually. (<http://www.tevalearnigcenter.org/>)

## **2. Environmental groups in Israel**

(Most Israeli websites have both a Hebrew and English version. If a listed website first appears on your screen in Hebrew, find and click on the "English" icon or link for the translation.)

**Arava Institute for Environmental Studies** is a teaching and research center that stresses regional cooperation in solving environmental problems, with the hope that this will lead to peace and harmony in the region. Located at Kibbutz Ketura, in the Negev, it educates Jewish, Palestinian, and Jordanian students, with the hope that they will become future environmental leaders in their countries. (<http://www.arava.org/>)

**Friends of the Earth Middle East (FoEME)** is a unique organization that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli environmentalists. Their primary objective is the promotion of cooperative efforts to protect our shared environmental heritage. In so doing, they seek to advance both sustainable regional development and the creation of necessary conditions for lasting peace in the Middle East. FoEME has offices in Tel Aviv, Amman, and Bethlehem. (<http://www.foeme.org/>)

**Green Course (*Megamah Yeruka*)** is Israel's largest environmental volunteer organization, with over 6,000 student members in 23 chapters on campuses across Israel. Through Green Course, students are active in projects to raise public awareness to environmental issues. The group plans to expand beyond the campuses that have been its central focus. ([www.green.org.il/eng/](http://www.green.org.il/eng/))

**Heschel Center for Environmental Learning and Leadership**, named after Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, trains leaders, produces publications on Israel's environmental problems, holds educational seminars, and cooperates with foundations in order to try to create a healthier, more environmentally sustainable Israel. (<http://www.israelgives.org/amuta/580237097>)

**Israel Union for Environmental Defense (I.U.E.D.), known** in Hebrew as *Adam Teva V'Din*, uses 30 environmentalists, attorneys, and scientists to work for a more environmentally sustainable Israel through education, litigation, and cooperation with local groups, and efforts to pass stronger environmental legislation. (<http://www.iued.org.il/>)

**Keren Kayemet L'Yisroel (KKL)**, Israel's Jewish National Fund, is leading the quest for a more environmental Israel by educating people to appreciation Israel's natural and cultural heritage. JNF's work in Israel is concentrated in six action areas: water, forestry and environment, education, community development and security, tourism and recreation, and research and development." (<http://www.kkl.org.il/>)

**Life and the Environment (*Chaim V'Sviva*)** serves as the umbrella organization of over 95 Israeli organizations that deal with public health, sustainable development, and public participation in planning. Life and the Environment focuses on empowering its member organizations in order to better influence decision-making processes, and it has assumed a leadership role in furthering the integration of issues of sustainable development and environmental justice into the discourse of both civil society and government agencies.” (<http://www.sviva.net/>)

**Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel (SPNI)** conducts numerous hikes and educational tours that many Israelis and tourists participate in and it helps educate the public on environmental issues. It also lobbies to promote a cleaner and greener Israel. It played a major role in preventing a major housing development that would have seriously harmed the Jerusalem Forest. (<http://www.spni.org/>)

The web sites of the organizations listed above can assist you in locating many additional Israeli environmental groups.

### **3. Jewish organizations combating hunger and poverty**

Many Jewish groups are working to reduce poverty and to help poor people in the United States and worldwide achieve self-sufficiency. Below are just a few of them:

**American Jewish World Service (AJWS)** strives to reduce poverty, hunger, and disease for all of the world’s people, based On the Jewish imperative to pursue justice. They use education, advocacy, volunteer service, and grants to local grassroots organizations to promote sustainable development and human rights for all people, and also work to educate Jews about Jewish teachings on the responsibilities of global citizenship. (<http://www.ajws.org/>)

**Jews For Racial and Economic Justice** pursues racial and economic justice in New York City by promoting systemic changes that can improve people's daily lives. They engage individual Jews and key Jewish leaders and institutions in the struggle for economic and racial justice in partnership with minority groups and low-income and immigrant communities. (<http://www.jfrej.org/>)

**Jewish Fund for Justice** helps Jewish grass roots social justice groups through education, technical assistance, and grants, to assist poor people and communities to become self-sufficient and to improve their living conditions. (<http://www.jfjustice.org/>)

**Mazon** provides a “Jewish Response to Hunger.” The group seeks to reduce hunger worldwide by encouraging Jews to donate three percent of the cost of their festive occasions to Mazon, which allocates these donations to hunger relief organizations in the US, Israel, and around the world to help feed hungry people. (<http://www.mazon.org/>)

**Ve’ahavta** is a Canadian humanitarian and relief organization that is motivated by the Jewish value of *tzedakah*—the obligation to act justly—to help needy people locally and abroad through volunteerism, education, and acts of kindness, while building bridges between Jews and others, worldwide. ([www.veahavta.org/](http://www.veahavta.org/))

#### **4. Jewish peace-and-justice-related groups**

**B’tselem** endeavors to document human rights violations in the West Bank and to educate the Israeli public and policymakers about them. It seeks a future where all Israelis and Palestinians will live in peace, freedom, and dignity. ([www.btselem.org/](http://www.btselem.org/))

**Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information** is a joint Palestinian-Israeli public policy organization that is committed to developing practical solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They publish articles and hold educational

meetings to increase awareness and actions that they hope will lead to greater tolerance, harmony, and peace.

([www.ipcri.org/](http://www.ipcri.org/))

**Jewish Peace Fellowship (JPF)** is “A Jewish voice in the peace community and a peace voice in the Jewish community.” They are a pacifist group committed to active nonviolence as a means of resolving conflicts, drawing on Jewish traditional sources within the Torah, the Talmud, and contemporary peacemaking activists like Martin Buber, Judah Magnes and Abraham Joshua Heschel. They also counsel conscientious objectors. (<http://www.jewishpeacefellowship.org/>)

**Jewish Peace Lobby** promotes a just, comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which they believe will lead to a secure and humane Israel, within which human rights and democratic values are protected. They try to be a counterpoint to other pro-Israel lobbying groups that generally give uncritical support to Israeli government actions.

(<http://www.peacelobby.org/>)

**J Street** is the “pro Israel-pro peace” organization that strives to give political voice to mainstream American Jews and other supporters of Israel who, “informed by their progressive and Jewish values, believe that a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is essential to Israel’s survival as the national home of the Jewish people and as a vibrant democracy.” (<http://www.jstreet.org/>)

**Peace Now** (*Shalom Achshav*) aims to sway public and governmental opinion toward achieving a just peace and a historic conciliation with the Palestinian People and neighboring Arab countries in exchange for a territorial settlement based on the formula of “land for peace.” They monitor construction on the West Bank and report on their findings, with the hope that increased awareness of the facts will slow settlement expansion.

They have a U.S. support group, “Americans for Peace Now.”

(<http://www.peacenow.org/>)



**Rabbis for Human Rights (RHR)** promotes the Jewish and Zionist tradition of concern for human rights. RHR promotes human rights in Israel and in the territories for which Israel has taken responsibility. ([www.rhr.org.il](http://www.rhr.org.il)) The group has a North American Support Group: Rabbis for Human Rights North America. (<http://www.rhr-na.org/>)

**Yesh Gvul** ("There is a limit!") is an Israeli peace group campaigning against the occupation by backing soldiers who refuse duties of a repressive or aggressive nature. With members drawn from a range of political views, Yesh Gvul is not bound to any specific peace program. Its overall aim is to combat the misuse of the Israel Defense Force (IDF) for unworthy ends, and terminate the occupation. (<http://www.yeshgevul.org/>)

## **5. Jewish animal rights and vegetarian groups**

**Alliance to End Chickens as Kapporos** is an association of groups and individuals who seek to replace the use of chickens in Kapparot ceremonies with money or other non-animal symbols of atonement. The Alliance does not oppose Kapparot per se, only the cruel and unnecessary use of chickens in the ceremony. (<http://www.endchickensaskaporos.com/>)

**Anonymous for Animal Rights**, Israel's leading animal rights group, chose the name "Anonymous" out of their deep solidarity with the suffering of animals who have no name, identity, or voice, "who are subjected to systematic abuse... imprisoned in laboratories, circuses, municipal pounds -- but above all on factory farms." (<http://www.anonymous.org.il/cat78.html>)

**Concern for Helping Animals in Israel (CHAI)** works on behalf of Israel's animals through its sister charity in Israel, **Hakol Chai** (everything lives). CHAI created an extensive humane education curriculum for schools, operates a mobile spay/neuter clinic, and campaigns in favor of a ban on cart horses on city streets and against gambling on horse racing

coming to Israel. ([www.chai-online.org/](http://www.chai-online.org/))

**Jewish Ecological and Vegetarian Society** has since 1965 been the center for international Jewish vegetarian activism. Centered in London, they distribute a quarterly publication *The Jewish Vegetarian* that includes articles, news of vegetarian events, recipes, and other vegetarian-related material. See <http://www.easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~bmjjhr/jvs.htm>

**Israeli Jewish Vegetarian Society (Ginger):** Centered in Jerusalem, the group helps educate Israelis about Jewish teachings on vegetarianism and brings Israeli vegetarians together through monthly lectures, cooking demonstrations, Tu B'Shvat and Passover seders, pot-luck meals, and other vegetarian-related events. [No website yet.]

**Jews for Animal Rights (JAR)** is a resource to educate people about and to answer questions on Jewish teachings on vegetarianism and animal rights. The group is associated with Micah Books, so many vegetarian and animal rights books are shown on their website. (<http://www.micahbooks.com/>)

**Jewish Vegetarians of North America (JVNA)** argues that Jewish mandates to preserve human health, treat animals with compassion, protect the environment, conserve natural resources, help hungry people, and pursue peace point to vegetarianism (and preferably veganism) as the ideal diet for Jews. To help increase awareness of Jewish teachings on vegetarianism, the group has given away over 35,000 complimentary DVDs with its acclaimed documentary, *A Sacred Duty Applying Jewish Values to Help Heal the World*. (<http://www.jewishveg.com/>)

**Shamayim V'Aretz**, A Center for Jewish Spirituality & Leadership, is a new group founded by Rabbi Shmuly Yanklowitz, a founder also of Uri L'Tzedek, whose core mission is to educate about the value of kosher veganism, to empower others to show leadership on animal welfare issues, and to build Jewish spiritual community around these issues (<http://www.shamayimvaretz.org/>)

## **6. Other activist Jewish organizations**

**CLAL**, “The National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership,” is a think tank, resource center, and leadership training institute that encourages pluralism and openness and strives to link innovative scholarship with Jewish wisdom to deepen Jewish involvement in American spiritual and civic life. (<http://www.clal.org/>)

**Jewish Prisoner Services International (JPSI)** serves Jewish inmates and their families worldwide. “Help our forgotten brethren: It’s the Jewish thing to do.” They provide volunteers (both rabbis and laypersons) to visit inmates, conduct classes, collect Jewish books and ritual items, and correspond as penpals. In addition, they advocate for Jewish prisoners’ religious rights within the prison system. (<http://www.jpsi.org/>)

**New Israel Fund (NIF)** is “a philanthropic partnership of North Americans and Israelis dedicated to strengthening democracy and advancing social justice and religious pluralism in Israel.” The group has over the years supported hundreds of Israeli NGOs committed to social justice, equality, peace, and tolerance in Israel. (<http://www.nif.org/>)

**Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC)** has been for over 50 years a center of legislative activity in Washington, DC, based on Jewish social justice teachings. The organization strives to educate and mobilize Reform Jews on involvement in over 70 societal issues, including civil rights, economic justice, civil liberties, religious liberty, and Israel. (<http://www.rac.org/>)

## **7. Organizations co-sponsored by Jews with others**

**The Abraham Fund Initiatives** has been working since 1989 to promote coexistence and equality among Israel’s Jewish and Arab citizens. Named for the common ancestor of both Jews

and Arabs, The Abraham Fund advances a cohesive, secure and just Israeli society by promoting policies based on innovative social models, and by conducting large-scale social change initiatives, advocacy and public education.

(<http://www.abrahamfund.org/>)

**Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam (“Oasis of Peace”)** is a village jointly established in 1985 by Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel, that is engaged in educational work for peace, equality and understanding between the two peoples. In addition to sponsoring local programs and a Palestinian children’s summer camp, NS-WAS has accommodations for individual visitors and groups, including a 39-room hotel, conference halls, restaurant and a café. (<http://www.nsawas.org/>)

**Interfaith Encounter Association** strives to promote Middle East peace through interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural study. They believe that religious teachings can and should help resolve conflicts that exist in the region and beyond.

(<http://www.interfaith-encounter.org/>)

**Network of Spiritual Progressives (NSP)** initiated and is actively promoting campaigns for a modern “Global Marshall Plan” (discussed in chapter 9) and a campaign for a constitutional amendment to preserve democracy and require corporate environmental responsibility.

(<http://www.spiritualprogressives.org/>)

## **Appendix F**

### **The Custom of Kapparot in the Jewish Tradition**

**By Yonassan Gershom and Richard Schwartz**

Every year, before Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), some Jews perform the ceremony of *kapparot*. The following, in question and answer format, is a discussion of the ritual and its relation to the treatment of animals.

#### **What is *kapparot* [in Ashkenazic Hebrew or Yiddish, *kapporos* or *shluggen kapporos*]?**

*Kapparot* is a custom in which the sins of a person are symbolically transferred to a fowl (or a substitute object — as discussed below). First, selections from Isaiah 11:9, Psalms 107:10, 14, and 17-21, and Job 33:23-24 are recited; then a rooster (for a male) or a hen (for a female) is held above the person's head and moved<sup>1</sup> in a circle three times, while the following is spoken: "This is my exchange, my substitute, my atonement; this rooster (or hen) shall go to its death, but I shall go to a good, long life, and to peace." The hope is that the fowl, which is then donated to the poor for food, will expiate the sins of the person who takes part in the ritual, and thereby avert any punishment or misfortune.

#### **What is the history of this rite?**

Kapparot is not mentioned in the Torah or in the Talmud. A possible forerunner is mentioned by Rashi (a tenth century scholar) in his commentary to the Talmud (Shabbat 81b), where he describes a custom of waving a potted seedling over one's head seven times and then throwing it into the river before Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) as an atonement. This was done with a prayer very similar to the one now used for *kapparot* before Yom Kippur, and indicates that such ceremonies did not always employ with a fowl.

Jewish scholars first discuss the custom of doing *kapparot* with chickens in the ninth century. They explain that since the Hebrew word *gever* means both “man” and “rooster,” punishment of the bird can be substituted for that of a person.

However, according to the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Volume 10, pages 756-757), several prominent Jewish scholars strongly opposed *kapparot* during the Middle Ages. Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham Aderet, one of the foremost Jewish scholars of the 13th century, considered it a heathen superstition. This opinion was shared by the Ramban (Nachmanides) and Rabbi Joseph Caro, the major codifier of Jewish law, who called it “a foolish custom” that Jews should avoid. These rabbis all felt that *kapparot* was a pagan custom that had mistakenly made its way into Jewish practice, perhaps because when Jews lived among pagans this rite seemed like a *korban* (sacrifice) to some extent.

On the other hand, the Kabbalists (led by mystics such as Rabbi Isaac Luria and Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz) perceived in this custom a mystical significance. Rabbi Moshe Isserlis (the major 16<sup>th</sup> century scholar known as the RaMA), whose interpretations of the *Shulchan Arukh* (Code of Jewish Law) are authoritative for Jews of Eastern European descent, also endorsed the custom of *kapparot* as valid and proper. This greatly enhanced the popularity of the *kapparot* ritual down to the present day.

The Baal Shem Tov, founder of Hasidism, also practiced *kapparot*, and most Hasidic communities are still in favor of keeping the custom as part of their traditions. Some Jews also feel that, although this is not officially a sacrifice, it keeps the concept of animal sacrifice alive in preparation for the rebuilding of the Temple.

## **Why did some Jewish commentators oppose doing kapparot with chickens?**

Some Jewish leaders felt that people would misunderstand the significance of the ritual. The belief that the ceremony of *kapparot* can transfer a person's sins to a bird, and that his or her sins would then be completely eradicated, is contrary to Jewish teachings. If the ritual could remove a person's sins, what would be the need for Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement? What would be the need for soul-searching and repentance?

The *Mishnah Brurah*, a major early 20<sup>th</sup> century commentary on Rabbi Joseph Caro's classical *Code of Jewish Law*, written by the respected Chofetz Chaim at the beginning of the 20th century, explains the significance of the ritual. Although he does not forbid it outrightly, the Chofetz Chaim stressed that a person cannot obtain purity from sin, and thus obtain higher levels of perfection, without repenting. Through God's mercy, we are given the Divine gift of repentance, so that we might abandon our corrupt ways, thereby being spared from the death that we deserve for our violation of the Divine law. The Chofetz Chaim concedes that by substituting the death of a fowl, one may (hopefully) be reminded of one's mortality and appreciate God's mercy in not killing us for our sins, and thereby be stirred to repentance. By no means, however, do the ritual and the slaughter of the bird itself eradicate one's misdeeds, even though the bird is donated to the poor.

The following statement by Rabbi David Rosen, former Chief Rabbi of Ireland, provides additional sources for the case against the use of chickens for kapparot:

Beyond the objections of the Ramban, Rashba and the Bet Yosef to the custom of *kapparot* and beyond the warnings of rabbinic authorities such as the *Chayei Adam*, *Kaf HaChaim*, *Aruch HaShulchan* and the *Mishnah Brurah* regarding the halachic infringements involved in using live fowl for this custom, the latter also desecrates the prohibition against *tsa'ar ba'alei chayim* (causing cruelty to animals).

## What are more recent objections to this ceremony?

In the past, when Jews lived in rural areas and raised their own chickens, it was a very simple matter to choose a hen or rooster from a local flock to be eaten for the pre-Yom Kippur meal. In fact, the *Shulchan Arukh* says not to specifically seek out a white chicken (in reference to Isaiah 1:18) or pay more for it than usual for the pre-fast meal, because this resembles the superstitions of the pagans (*darchei ha-Emori*).<sup>2</sup> Instead, people should use whatever chickens they already have on hand, the same as for any other meal.

Nowadays, however, most Jews are urban and nobody has his or her own chickens, white or otherwise. Today's chickens used for *kapparot* are all white, factory-farmed birds,<sup>3</sup> brought in specifically for the ritual, and they often do cost more than a chicken at the grocery. One could therefore argue that everyone is "seeking out a white chicken" and that the ritual has become a superstitious practice.

Because modern *kapparot* chickens are trucked into the city from long distances, often in open trucks exposed to the weather and without adequate food or water, the question of *tsa'ar ba'alei chaim* (cruelty to animals) has become an important issue. The birds may also suffer while they are being handled for sale or during the ceremony, because many urban Jews are unfamiliar with the proper, humane way to hold a chicken. (Which should be with a hand above and one below the bird, supporting the weight of the body, not held with the wings painfully pinned back, as is done at some *kapparot* centers.)<sup>4</sup>

In some places in Israel and the United States, chickens are sold on street corners for this ceremony, and not every merchant takes proper care of his chickens during this period. The birds are frequently cooped up in baskets, and some merchants neglect to give them sufficient food or water. In some cases, the caged chickens have been left out in the rain or under the hot sun with no shade or shelter, or simply abandoned in warehouses and left to starve if not sold in time for the ceremony.

Although Rabbi Isaac Luria (the Ari) supported this ritual in his day, he was also against the unnecessary suffering of animals. In *Shivchei Ha-Ari*, there is a story of how the Ari told



a student that he had lost his place in the World to Come for failing to feed and water his chickens properly. The cries of those suffering chickens were canceling out all the prayers and Torah learning of that student. This is based on the general principle that one cannot commit a sin — in this case, cruelty to animals — in order to do a *mitzvah*.

There is also the additional problem, already raised in the *Shulchan Arukh* in the 16th century, of animals experiencing fear during slaughtering from seeing other animals slaughtered in front of them, which is forbidden.<sup>5</sup> This fear can even cause the lungs to shrivel and render the meat not kosher (*Shulchan Arukh* Yoreh Deah 36:14). The *Yad Ephraim*, commenting on this ruling, refers specifically to the problem of many people standing in line side-by-side with fowl to be slaughtered for *kapparot*, saying, “And this [slaughtering of one bird in the sight of another] is not correct for this is a violation of *tsa’ar ba’alei chaim*... and there is no greater infraction of animal cruelty than this. And we do not say that fowl do not have feelings, for behold it was just described that sometimes their lung is shriveled due to the sight of slaughter before them” (*Yad Ephraim*, Yoreh Deah 34:14).

In more recent times, the renowned Haredi kabbalist Rabbi Yitzchak Kadouri (died in 2006) writes that one should abstain from using chickens for *kapparot* due to “the cruelty to animals, which is prohibited by the Torah, and *kashrut* problems.” For those reasons, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (1910-1995), a leading authority on Jewish law and head of the *Kol Torah* yeshiva in Jerusalem, also stopped using animals for *kapparot*, giving money to charity instead.

In addition, it should be noted that in some recent cases in New York City, the meat was not actually given to the poor, but simply discarded in the trash at the site of the ceremony, because there was no time to properly kasher and distribute it. This is a violation of *bal tashchit*, the principle that we should not waste or needlessly destroy things. Again, one cannot do a sin in order to fulfill a *mitzvah*.

So we must ask ourselves: what is the spiritual impact of this ceremony in modern times? Does the suffering of the chickens outweigh any benefit that might be derived from it? While the Jewish tradition is filled with concepts, prayers, and actions during the Rosh Hashanah-Yom Kippur period that are

designed to emphasize the importance of *rachamim* (compassion and sensitivity), the message of *kapparot* to those who take part and those who watch it (including children) may be just the opposite. In some cases, they may learn a lesson of insensitivity to the suffering and feelings of other living creatures.

### **How should Jews who are concerned about the treatment of animals respond to this issue?**

Jews who are concerned about the treatment of animals should try to engage *courteously and respectfully* with Jews who perform *kapparot* by using chickens. It should be recognized that they are performing what they regard as an important religious act. Shouting slogans like “meat is murder” or accusing them of being “barbaric” or “medieval” will be ineffective and will only serve to arouse hostility. Traditional communities resent “outsiders” telling them what is “wrong” with their cultures. In order to have a dialogue with religious people, one must be willing to meet them respectfully within the context of their own worldview. Here are some of the points that might be respectfully brought up:

1. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, Rashi cites a *kapparot*-type ceremony where a plant was used instead of an animal, indicating that it is not “written in stone” to slaughter a chicken. Today, there is another substitute *kapparot* ceremony that is widely practiced by many Torah-observant Jews. Money, perhaps equal to the monetary value of the fowl, is substituted for the rooster or hen. The money is put into a handkerchief, which the person then swings three times around his or her head while reciting a modified version of the prayer: “This money shall go to charity, and I shall go to a good, long life, and to peace.” This is based on the statement in the Torah that people who lived too far from Jerusalem to bring their tithes in animals or produce could “turn it into money” and bring that instead (Deut. 14:24-26). By substituting money for a fowl in *kapparot*, the heightened sense of repentance can be kept, and perhaps even enhanced, since no bird has to lose its life or suffer for our sake. This substitution, which maintains the tradition of giving charity (the substituted money) to the

poor, has been endorsed by many rabbis and is mentioned in many prayer books, including the *Artscroll Siddur*, used in many Orthodox synagogues.

2. We should attempt to increase the knowledge of Jews with regard to Judaism's beautiful and powerful teachings concerning compassion to animals. Many examples are in Chapter 11, so they will not be repeated here.

3. Based on the enormous weight of Biblical, Talmudic, medieval, and modern sources commanding the prevention of animal suffering, it can be argued that one way that Jews can accomplish repentance and other goals of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur is by moving away from the unnecessary exploitation of animals. Many of the observances and values of this holiday period are more consistent with practicing mercy toward all of God's creatures:

- Prayers on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur for God's compassion during the coming year are most consistent with acts of kindness to both other people and animals. The following story reinforces that idea: Rabbi Israel Salanter, one of the most distinguished Orthodox rabbis of the nineteenth century, failed to appear one Yom Kippur eve to chant the sacred Kol Nidre Prayer. His congregation became concerned, for it was inconceivable that their saintly rabbi would be late or absent on this very holy day. They sent out a search party to look for him. After much time, their rabbi was found in the barn of a Christian neighbor. On his way to the synagogue, Rabbi Salanter had come upon one of his neighbor's calves, lost and tangled in the brush. Seeing that the animal was in distress, he freed it and led it home through many fields and over many hills. This act of mercy represented the rabbi's prayers on that Yom Kippur evening.<sup>6</sup>
- Consistent with Rosh Hashanah as a time when Jews are to "awaken from slumber" and mend our ways, using money for the *kapparot* ritual shows that we are putting Torah teachings about compassion into practice.

- Acts of kindness and charity are consistent with God's "delighting in life" on Rosh Hashanah, since, unlike the *kapparot* ceremony using chickens, they don't involve the potentially cruel treatment and death of animals.

4. Finally, we should remind others that *kapparot* is not Biblically or Talmudically ordained (as is *tsa'ar ba'alei chaim*), that the custom arose at a later period in Jewish history, that it has been rejected by many Jewish sages, and that the important goal of increasing our sensitivity to the importance of repentance and charity can be accomplished as well, and perhaps better, by substituting money for a bird. As Rabbi David Rosen, former Chief Rabbi of Ireland, puts it:

Those who wish to fulfill this custom can do so fully and indeed in a far more halachically acceptable manner by using money as a substitute, as proposed by many Jewish authorities.

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### Notes for Appendix F

<sup>1</sup> Some older English-language commentaries (and many Internet sites) have "swung" but this is a mistranslation. The bird is not supposed to be whirled around as if winding up to throw a fastball — it is merely waved slowly over the head, in imitation of the Temple "wave offerings" described in the Torah. Unfortunately, it is true that some people are now literally swinging the chickens, possibly due to this very mistranslation. However, such swinging could cause pain or injury to the bird, which would violate the prohibition against cruelty to animals.

<sup>2</sup> The Isaiah text reads: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow." This is also the basis for wearing white clothing on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Seeking out a white animal for a sacrifice, however, borders on idolatry, because white animals are often considered sacred by pagan cultures and/or were sacrificed to various gods. Google "sacred white animals" and you will find many examples of this belief even today. Therefore, the *Shulchan Arukh* says that if you already have a white chicken in your flock, it is preferable to use it

for the symbolism, but don't go out specifically looking for one.

<sup>3</sup> Although pure white chickens were relatively rare in ancient times, the modern poultry industry has bred both chickens and turkeys for the white color in order to have a "cleaner" carcass with no dark pinfeathers when plucked. Practitioners of *kapparot* might therefore argue that they are not seeking out white birds specifically, just using whatever the farmer brings. However, if a truckload of brown chickens were to be sent instead, it is highly likely that many people nowadays would not consider them to be appropriate for *kapparot*. In any case, the question of cruelty in the process of trucking them in from long distances still remains.

<sup>4</sup> Older paintings and photographs of *kapparot* clearly show the birds being held properly, upright with the body supported. One is tempted to suggest that the recent adoption of the wing-pinning method has more to do with not getting one's clothes soiled than concern for the comfort of the chicken. Rabbi Shea Hecht, in demonstrating this method of holding the chicken, claims that it "calms" the bird. What is more likely, however, is that this "calm" is really the terrified "freeze" reaction of a prey animal being held by a predator.

If you can imagine having your arms pulled back and then being suspended by your elbows, you can get a sense of what the wing-pinning method must feel like to a chicken, whose wings are not strong enough for flight or supporting the body weight. You would probably stop struggling with your arms pinned like that, but you would by no means be comfortable or relaxed. Chickens held upside down by their feet will also cease struggling, but again, this does not mean they are calm. It is more akin to "playing dead" in the hope that you, the predator, will be fooled and let go of the bird.

<sup>5</sup> In a recent blog discussion about *kapparot*, one heckler asked sarcastically: "Do you really think chickens are smart enough to know they are being made to suffer?" Yes, they are. Free-run chickens have a social structure with over 40 different communication calls, and can pass learned behavior from one generation to another. They are also capable of recognizing over 100 individual chickens within the flock. Recent research has shown that a chicken's intelligence and learning ability is about equal to that of a 3-year-old child – more than enough for a hen to be aware of what is happening to her during *kapparot*.

<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that one can normally skip prayers anytime one pleases. (As this story has sometimes been misinterpreted to mean.) Since the evening prayers can be recited anytime during the night, an ordinary person would simply say them later and his or her absence would probably go unnoticed. Another alternative would have been to recite the prayers along the road as he was leading the calf home, assuming he had them memorized. However, Rabbi Salanter was the leader of the community, so everyone was aware of his absence. He therefore chose to use the event as a public lesson in kindness to animals.



The [Alliance to End Chickens as Kaporos](http://www.EndChickensAsKaporos.com) is an association of groups and individuals who seek to replace the use of chickens in *Kapparot* ceremonies with money or other non-animal symbols of atonement. The Alliance does not oppose *Kapparot* per se, only the cruel and unnecessary use of chickens in the ceremony.

## Appendix G

### Raising Holy Sparks: Hasidic Thought and Vegetarianism

An interview with Rabbi Yonassan Gershom

*All things of this world that belong to man desire with all their might to draw near him in order that the Sparks of Holiness that are in them should be raised by him back to God... Man eats them, man drinks them, man uses them; these are the Sparks that dwell in the things. Therefore, one should have mercy on his tools and all his possessions for the sake of the Sparks that are in them; one should have mercy on the Holy Sparks. — The Baal Shem Tov, founder of Hasidism*

**Richard:** Yonassan, as a vegetarian activist, I often am confronted with the following question: What about the Hasidic view that, when one is pious and performs *mitzvot* (Torah commandments), he or she elevates an animal by consuming its flesh, since the energy produced from the animal is used to perform *mitzvot* which the animal could not perform in any other way? How do you, as a vegetarian Hasid, deal with this basic Hasidic doctrine?

**Yonassan:** This is a very difficult question for many Hasidic Jews who are considering vegetarianism, including me. I struggled with it for many years. I went back and forth between being basically a vegetarian at home and eating meat when in the Hasidic community. On the one hand, I wanted to fulfill the *mitzvot* connected with meat, but on the other hand, I was losing my taste for meat. It took a long time for me to reconcile the two worldviews and become a committed vegetarian — but it can be done, as I will explain here.

**Richard:** Very good — but first, can you briefly explain what the “Holy Sparks” concept is?

**Yonassan:** This is related to the following kabbalistic teachings: During the Creation of the universe — even before Eden, at the time of “In the Beginning”— the first set of Holy Vessels (*Sephirot*) that were intended to contain the Divine Light were shattered because they were created to receive the Light, but not to pass it on. So they became overfilled and burst, so to speak. (This is, of course, all symbolism. A “vessel” in kabbalah refers to something that is able to receive and contain, not literal jars or pots. The same goes for “holy sparks” (*netzotzot*) — these are a type of spiritual energy.)

Now, according to kabbalah, when the vessels shattered, some of these sparks of holiness fell to lower levels than they were supposed to be, ultimately becoming entrapped in material things. So God created humans to help “raise” these sparks back to their proper places in the universe, through the *mitzvot*. When the *mitzvot* are done with the proper intention (*kavannah*) by a pious person, these acts can “elevate” the sparks within the material world back into their proper place in creation. This, in turn, is part of the kabbalistic process of *tikkun olam*, repairing the universe, as taught by Rabbi Isaac Luria in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This process culminates in the coming of *Mashiach* (Messiah), and the restoration of spiritual harmony among all of God’s creation.

**Richard:** So how does all this relate to eating meat?



**Yonassan:** Both kabbalists and Hasidim see meat eating as part of this process, because they believe that the spirits of animals are thus elevated into their proper levels of holiness too. They also believe that the animals want to be eaten for this purpose, the same as a human might be willing to give up his or her life for a holy cause. In a way, this is not unlike the philosophy of the North American Indians, who believe that animals willingly give their lives so that the people may live. It's an idea that sounds foreign to modern ears, and especially alien to vegetarians, but is quite common among the tribal peoples of the world. It implies a reciprocal sacred relationship between animals and humans in the natural order of creation.

**Richard:** If it's reciprocal, then what do the animals get out of it?

**Yonassan:** In the Native Indian cultures, the animals are honored in ceremonies, thanked for their meat, and their spirits go free to the Other World. In Judaism, the animals get to participate in the cosmic process of *tikkun olam*, repairing the universe, and their spirits are elevated in this process. In kabbalah, there is a reincarnational aspect to this teaching as well. Sometimes a human soul is reincarnated as an animal, but retains its human consciousness, in order to atone for a specific sin. In *Shivchei Ha-Ari* (16th century collection of stories about Rabbi Isaac Luria, known as the Ari), there are several tales about the Ari communicating with human souls in animal bodies. Similar stories are also recorded about the early Hasidic masters. In many of these cases, the soul in the animal asks the *Rebbe* to use its meat for a specific mitzvah, in order to offset the sin and set the soul free to reincarnate as a human being once again. This, too, is part of the process of "elevating holy sparks."

**Richard:** You said earlier that you reconciled this with vegetarianism. Can you elaborate on that?

**Yonassan:** Well, if you look at the doctrine as it was originally taught by Rabbi Luria, you will find that the process is cumulative, not a self-perpetuating cycle for all eternity. In

fact, Luria believed that most of the sparks had already been elevated in his day — and that was back in the 1500s! This partly accounts for the messianic fervor among Jews in the mid-1600s, which culminated in thousands of people following the false Messiah, Shabbetai Zevi. After that debacle, the rabbis discouraged people from studying kabbalah or trying to bring the Messiah. When Hasidism emerged in the 1700s, it was accused of being a revival of Sabbatianism. To refute this, the messianic expectations were toned down somewhat, and “raising holy sparks” was seen as more of a perpetual cycle. But that’s not how it was originally understood, where the goal was to return to the harmony of Eden.

**Richard:** But Eden was vegetarian. So wouldn’t that mean we are supposed to be actively moving toward vegetarianism?

**Yonassan:** Yes, if you see “raising sparks” as a process moving toward a goal, which I do. And I also see it as an individualized process. It is standard Hasidic thought that each human being is born with the mission to elevate specific sparks and not others. So it stands to reason that some people are not meant to be elevating the sparks in meat, and their special sparks lie elsewhere. In fact, Rabbi Luria was of the opinion that only saintly scholars should eat meat, and then only in small amounts. For ordinary people, the sparks in meat were too dangerous and should be avoided.

**Richard:** Now that is something I just don’t understand. It would seem to me that the holier a person is, the more compassionate that person would become, which would then lead them to not wanting to eat or harm animals. So why would *tzaddikim* (saintly individuals) be the ones to raise the sparks in meat?

**Yonassan:** Good question. To answer it, we must keep in mind that it is also possible to *drag down* the holy sparks into lower levels. A person who is not worthy, or who does not eat meat with the proper spiritual intentions, can impede the whole *tikkun* process. And that’s what I believe happens when a glutton gobbles a fast-food hamburger on the fly — even if the

beef is technically kosher. In such a case, he does nothing to elevate the sparks in meat. Instead, the meat drags him down to the gross material level,

Precisely because eating meat involves taking the life of another living being, one must be extremely careful with how that meat is handled. We find in the Torah, for example, that certain sacrifices were to be eaten only by the *kohanim* (Temple priests) and their families, and then only in a ritually-purified place. Even after the Temple was destroyed, this attitude toward meat as a sacred food was carried over.

It once happened that one of Rebbe Nachman of Breslov's followers was thinking about becoming a *shochet* (kosher slaughterer) and asked the Rebbe for his opinion. The Rebbe responded by giving lesson #37 of *Likutei Moharan*, which explains that the soul of the animal is attached to the blood and that the *shochet* must have true *kavannah* in wielding the knife in order to raise the sparks properly. Failure to do so affects not only the animal, but also the livelihood of the whole Jewish people because "where there is no Torah, there is no bread" (*Pirke Avot* 3:17). After hearing this lesson, the disciple decided against becoming a *shochet*. It was too great a responsibility.

**Richard:** There is a lot of truth in that story. It reminds me of the recent scandal at the Agriprocessors kosher meat plant in Postville, Iowa. Here was this company providing meat to literally millions of Jews, while at the same time, violating labor laws, hiring illegal aliens and minors, violating immigration laws, committing financial fraud, and, in some cases, not even slaughtering the cows properly. Surely that must have dragged the whole Jewish community down.

**Yonassan:** Yes, I believe it did — not only in terms of bad ethics and negative publicity, but in a spiritual sense as well. Given what was going on in that processing plant, it's hard to believe anybody had a sense of *kavannah*. When I brought this up to a Chabad rabbi, he told me that the *shochet* does not need to have *kavannah*; he only needs to make the cut right. But this contradicts the teaching of Rebbe Nachman I cited above. If all we needed was a proper cut, we might as well have a machine

do it. And in a sense, the *shochet* in such a factory is little more than a cog in the machine.

**Richard:** I imagine it would be hard to be much else than a cog in today's high-speed, industrialized processing plants.

**Yonassan:** Indeed. You know, in all the older stories about animals and raising sparks, there's always a very personalized aspect to it. A specific animal comes to a specific sage at a specific time and requests to be slaughtered and used for a specific mitzvah. So, for example, we have the story of Rabbi Yehuda Hirsch of Strettana, a 19th-century Hasidic *Rebbe*, who had once been a ritual slaughterer. So pure and holy was he that flocks of wild doves came of their own accord to lie down under his knife, because they trusted him to have the proper spiritual focus to free their souls. At that time, animals were treated as sentient individuals that made conscious decisions. And when the time came to butcher the family cow, the person eating the meat also had some personal interaction with the animal.

Today, however, this kind of relationship no longer exists. Most of us don't take our own cow or chicken to the *shochet* — a lot of Jews have never even seen a live cow, and few of us ever meet the *shochet*. We know meat only as a packaged product wrapped in cellophane and Styrofoam. Nor is there much interaction between the *shochet* and the animal as in the story of Rabbi Yehuda Hirsch. Everything is done at such high speed that the animals are nothing more than objects whizzing by on an assembly line.

I first realized this back in the 1980s, when I visited a kosher slaughterhouse. Up until that time, I was still thinking in terms of old Hasidic stories that took place in little 18<sup>th</sup>-century Polish villages. I simply did not realize how much the assembly-line mentality had affected the whole process.

In past generations, an individual blessing was said with *kavannah* (intention) before slaughtering each animal, and they were slaughtered only for special occasions. But in today's high-speed industry, most *shochtim* can only make a single blessing for the whole day's quota of animals because everything moves at such breakneck speed. In chicken

processing plants, for example, dozens of chickens are slaughtered *every minute*. So how can there possibly be proper *kavannah* for the elevation of the soul of each individual bird?

I have to ask myself: If Rabbi Yehuda Hirsch were alive today, would he be willing to participate in this high-speed *shechitah*? Would chickens ever willingly come to be slaughtered in a modern processing plant, like the doves that came to Rabbi Hirsch? I think not. Given today's mechanized conditions, I feel that there is no longer any saintly merit in eating meat. We are left with nothing but the empty shell (*klippah*) of fleshpots without holiness.

**Richard:** In recent years, there has been an increase in vegetarianism among Jews, especially in Israel. Does this have anything to do with “raising sparks,” or is it simply a matter of people changing their diets for other reasons?

**Yonassan:** I think it's both. There are many people who, for a variety of mundane reasons, decide to give up meat. Maybe it's for a diet, maybe it's cheaper, maybe they don't like the cruelty of factory farms, etc. But I think there is another, more mystical process at work in the world. As we come closer to the time of *Mashiach*, the process of raising sparks through the consumption of meat is also nearing completion. I believe that there are people who lose their taste for meat because they have already elevated the specific sparks in meat that they are intended to elevate. Very often, they aren't even aware of this process. They might even laugh at the idea. But still, it happens.

You know, if you look at the way that people evolve into vegetarians, it often follows the categories of animals as defined by the laws of *kashrut*. First they give up seafood, pork, and exotic species that were never kosher in any case. Next, they give up red meat, which has very strict rules about which parts of the animal may or may not be eaten, such as discarding the kidney fat, not eating the sciatic nerve, etc. Next comes poultry, which is still meat, but not so strict; you can pretty much eat the whole bird, including the fat. After this they give up fish, which have rules about which species are permitted, but no specific requirements for slaughtering them.

At this point, the person is an ovo-lacto vegetarian who still eats eggs and dairy. Some people go further, giving up eggs because they are potentially a baby chicken. Vegans go the furthest, giving up milk as well, and eating only plant-based diets. People naturally follow this order even if they haven't the slightest awareness of the kosher laws.

This suggests to me that keeping kosher is not about "health rules" as the secularists claim. It's about the spiritual "energy" in the foods. "Humanity does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God does humankind live" (Deuteronomy 8:3). The kabbalists understand this verse to mean that as God "speaks" the creation into being; the "words" God uses are the spiritual energies within all things. And it is this "word" that sustains us, not just the physical biochemistry of our foods.

The heaviest spiritual "energy" — which is forbidden for Jews to eat at all — is found in pork and shellfish. The lightest is in plant foods, with a spectrum in between. So the natural order goes like this: Forbidden species, red meat species, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy, plants.

**Richard:** So what you are saying is, the best diet for today is vegetarianism?

**Yonassan:** It would seem so. Because there is also a kabbalistic concern about the spiritual effect of meat eating on the person. Rabbi Chaim Kramer, a respected contemporary Breslov scholar who is not vegetarian, nevertheless notes in his commentary to Rebbe Nachman's *Likutei Moharan* (section 37:6) that "when a person eats the meat of an animal which lacks proper *shechitah*, he also ingests the aspects of animal matter, darkness, foolishness, judgments, forgetfulness, and death." This is because the *shochet*, by not *shechting* properly, has failed to elevate the fallen sparks. So the meat drags the person down spiritually, instead of him lifting the animal's essence upward. As I already pointed out, the very nature of modern meat processing makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for a *shochet* to have the proper *kavannah*.

In the cases where a sinful soul has reincarnated as an animal — which sometimes happens, although it is not the

normal course of things – then there is the additional danger that, if one is not holy enough to elevate the soul in the meat, then that soul may attach itself to you and, in turn, drag you down into sin. For this reason, Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, a major 16th century kabbalist, expressed the opinion that one should eat a minimum of animal flesh.

Not only does eating animal foods debase the sinner, but the animals themselves are debased by misuse of their energy, for which the person who ate them will have to answer in the next life. In his book, *My Prayer*, Lubavitcher Hasid Rabbi Nissim Mindel notes that if one eats a chicken and then uses its energy to cheat or steal, the chicken can demand at the Heavenly Court, “By what right have you taken my life, and involved me in crime, which I would never have committed otherwise?” These teachings strongly indicate that raising sparks through eating meat is not something to be taken lightly. This is why the Talmudic sages taught, “One who is ignorant of Torah is forbidden from eating meat” (Pesachim 49b). It wasn’t only about knowing the Torah texts; it also involved understanding the spiritual processes involved. How many of us in this day and age are holy enough to eat meat with the right consciousness to raise the sparks?

**Richard:** As a non-Hasid, I would respectfully agree that it seems hard to see how sparks of holiness can be elevated under modern conditions that involve so much cruelty to animals and do so much harm to people and the world. Also, based on recent nutritional studies, one would be better able to perform *mitzvot* and other sacred activities through a sensible, nutritious vegetarian diet, rather than by eating meat, with all its negative health effects.

**Yonassan:** As a Hasid who takes these teachings seriously, I would agree with you, even if for different reasons. In this day and age, to become a vegetarian is to help bring the *Mashiach*.





## Appendix H

### A Dialogue on “Nature Deficit Disorder”

By Richard Schwartz and Yonassan Gershom

*When Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak, the Seer of Lublin, was still a young boy, he loved going alone into the forest. His father asked him what he was doing out there, wasting his time wandering among the trees. "I am looking for God," the boy replied. His father then asked, "But isn't God everywhere, and isn't he everywhere the same?" The young Seer replied, "He is, but I am not." – Hasidic folktale*

*Even things you see as superfluous in this world – like flies, fleas and mosquitoes – are part of the greater scheme of the creation of the world. “And God saw all that God had created, and behold it was very good.” Rabbi Acha bar Rabbi Chanina said: Even things...like snakes and scorpions. – (Midrash Exodus Rabba 10:1)*

*A worm serves the Creator with all of his intelligence and ability... A person should consider himself and the worm and all creatures as comrades in the universe, for we are all created beings whose abilities are God-given. – The Baal Shem Tov (Tzava'as HaRivash 12)*

The following dialogue is reconstructed from numerous conversations that we (Richard and Yonassan) have had over the years. In a sense, we are doing a Jewish version of “The City Mouse and the Country Mouse,” because Richard has spent most of his life in the New York City area, while Yonassan lives in rural Minnesota. This gives us different but complimentary perspectives on Jews and nature.

**Yonassan:** I just finished reading a book called *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder* by Richard Louv. “Nature deficit disorder” is not a medical diagnosis; it’s a term he made up to describe what he sees as a very serious deficit in childhood experience nowadays. The book examines some serious psychological research and concludes that direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development and for the physical and emotional health of children and adults.

Louv makes the point that, as parents have become more and more worried about child abductions, accidents on playgrounds, lawsuits, etc., the lives of children have become overly controlled and, more and more, their playtime is all happening indoors. With many housing developments and condos having covenants forbidding tree houses, playhouses, even gardens in some areas, kids who do have a backyard have only dull, boring places to play. Everything is being so tightly organized by adults, there is little or no free time for children to develop their creativity. Add to this the fact that kids are spending hours and hours in front of TVs and computers, developing obesity problems and having heart attacks in high school (unheard of when we were growing up), and there is a serious problem affecting modern society. And we Jews are not immune.

**Richard:** I agree that kids being so far from nature today and having little contact with animals is a major factor behind their lack of interest in animals and the environment. But I also think that so much of the *siddur* (prayer book) and the Torah involving discussions of sacrifices and so little involving discussions of *tsa’ar ba’alei chayim* (prevention of cruelty) and

other positive teachings about animals and environmental stewardship, as compared to discussions of laws of *kashrut* and *shechitah*, is a factor.

**Yonassan:** Actually, the *siddur* and Tanach have a lot of very positive nature material, especially in the Psalms — enough so that the Baal Shem Tov and others in his generation saw the connection between nature and God very clearly. And this is why Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, the great-grandson of the Baal Shem Tov, told his followers to spend an hour a day praying alone in the woods and fields. Breslovers still try to do that today, although in a city it is hard to find the solitude. But at least they have the teachings about spending time in nature, which many other groups do not. In fact, mainstream Jews have sometimes considered the Breslovers crazy to go wandering in the woods. Rabbi Odesser, a Breslov teacher who died in 1994, once told how, when he started following that path in his youth, the local rabbi warned his parents that roaming in the woods could cause their son to literally lose his mind.

Now, I don't think being with nature makes you go insane. Quite the opposite is true: It restores your sanity and opens you up to connecting with God in a very real and personal way, because when you spend time in God's creation, everything around you is alive. Rebbe Nachman even taught that the grasses and trees would join in your prayers.

**Richard:** Yes, and this wonderful Breslov approach to finding God in nature is brought out in that award-winning Israeli film, *Ushpizin*, about a Breslov couple who made great sacrifices to get the ideal esrog to celebrate the Sukkot holiday, and whose great faith in God resulted in their finally being blessed with a child. At the moment of his greatest test, Moshe, the main character in the movie, runs out into the forest to pour out his heart to God in a very personal way.

**Yonassan:** A wonderfully authentic film! And not just for us media buffs, either. A lot of Haredi Jews who don't go to movie theaters were watching it at home on DVD and praising it, too. It touched a lot of hearts.

So, continuing on the theme of finding consciousness in nature, let's consider Psalm 148, where everything in the universe — sun, moon, stars, oceans, fire, snow, and hail — is praising God. Or Psalm 150: *Kol ha-neshamah te'hallel Yah* — "everything that has breath is praising God" and similar lines in Psalms. I like to think that King David, the sweet singer of Psalms, acquired this sensitivity to nature during the years when he was a shepherd boy. Those formative years spent outdoors shaped his awareness in a way that he never forgot.

**Richard:** I can relate to that, because I have always enjoyed hiking in nature, seeing beautiful nature scenes, petting dogs, etc. And my appreciation of nature was greatly increased during several summers when I attended Boy Scout camp. I also enjoyed swimming in the waters of the Atlantic Ocean when I lived near there as a youngster. These are experiences I still carry with me, and they helped shape my sensitivity to all living things. One of my favorite activities is just sitting in my back yard and reading. This setting is certainly nothing like your farm, Yonassan, but I am surrounded with trees and bushes and often see birds, squirrels and other wildlife sharing the space. It is also a great place to meditate and I often think of it as a miniature Garden of Eden. So I often wonder, as the congregation recites *Nishmat*, how so many people can be so cut off from other living things.

**Yonassan:** I think these teachings don't stand out to most Jews nowadays because there is no real contact with animals or nature to ground the texts in everyday life. Without such experiences, the texts have become meaningless. For example, there is so much pollution in the atmosphere in urban areas that even if someone were to try to gauge the time for saying *Shema* by seeking three stars, they would err. So they rely on their wristwatches and astronomical calculations, which are not bad things in themselves, but if you have never looked up at a starry sky or listened to a chorus of birds singing at dawn, how can you make any real connection with the texts that describe such things? How can you picture God as a mother eagle sheltering Her nest if you've never seen a bird nesting, and know eggs only as something in Styrofoam boxes that you buy at the

supermarket? In many of our yeshivas, even the teachers often lack these firsthand experiences with nature. So they focus on stuff that is familiar to them, namely, the rules of *kashrut* and using animals as food. Environmental laws are not seen as important.

**Richard:** Indeed. I was once at an outdoor Sukkot get-together. Upon seeing some ducks in a nearby backyard, one child said, "Let's *shecht* (slaughter) them."

**Yonassan:** This is exactly what I mean. They see animals only in utilitarian terms. I had a similar experience with insects. When I was in Montreal a number of years back, I visited this amazing museum called the Insectarium that has collections of bugs, live and mounted, from all over the world. There is also a butterfly room where you can walk through and see all kinds of free-flying butterflies. Visiting there was an amazing experience. But my fellow Jews simply did not get why I would want to go there. Only one person understood, because she had been to the museum herself. She said, "When I saw all those amazing bugs, I understood how beautifully HaShem had made the world." However, she was the exception. To most Orthodox Jews, bugs are just something *trayfe* (not kosher) that we must remove from our vegetables.

I recently got an email from a New Yorker who had started an organic garden for everyone in her building. Only there was a Hasidic family who told her they couldn't use the food because of problems with "cleaning" the vegetables. The gardener was totally mystified as to what this could mean. Well, the only thing I could think of was that the Hasidim were concerned about insects on the food, which might be more likely on organic veggies than ones that were sprayed with insecticides. But what these urban Hasidim are missing is the fact that a hundred years ago, their *stetl* ancestors would have gotten all their vegetables from local farmers, not imported from mega-farms hundreds of miles away. Back then most foods were organic, and they didn't come wrapped in plastic, either.

**Richard:** I recall the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the eminent American 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and essayist, connecting nature to the perceptions in our minds. Among his many statements about nature are the following: “Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience” and “Nature and books belong to the eyes that see them.”

**Yonassan:** Very true. And if our minds and eyes are not attuned to it, then we do not see it. One summer during my college years, I was hired as the very first nature study instructor at a well-established Jewish summer camp — but only because none of the staff could recognize poison ivy. Getting these fellow Jews to see any beauty in the forest was the most frustrating camp job I ever had.

Nevertheless, there were a few small victories, such as the time we all watched in awe as a Luna moth emerged from its cocoon, or the night when we marveled at thousands of fireflies reflected in the lake. At the end of the summer, one of the counselors thanked me, confiding that although she had attended that camp since childhood, she had never before seen anything there but “a bunch of trees and a dirty old lake.”

Nor is this attitude gone today. If anything, it has gotten worse, at least within much of the Orthodox community. I recently spoke to a woman in Brooklyn who told me that the most difficult thing for her becoming religious was giving up her cat. Why did she have to do that? Because the community pressured her, even though there is no prohibition against owning a cat. So not only does the Orthodox community have little or no contact with nature or animals, they expect people who do have those connections to give that up when they join the community. To me, this is a step backwards. It’s like taking a free bird and cramming it into a cage for the rest of its life.

There are, of course, some newcomers who try to keep their connection with nature. Also in Brooklyn, I stayed with a young man and his family, who had once lived on a farm. He was now growing horseradish and a willow bush in big pots on the fire escape, and the children were planting bean seeds in cups on the windowsill. “I want my children to know where these things come from,” he told me. He also had a bird feeder.

So even in the heart of the city, it is possible to stay connected to God's creation, if you make the effort.

**Richard:** I agree. But let's go back to the cat story for a moment. Why would her community feel she couldn't have a cat?

**Yonassan:** The answer she got was that a Jewish home is like a temple, and in the Holy Temple they did not have cats, so Jews should not keep any animal in the house that was not allowed in the Temple. Which is halachic nonsense, and, in my opinion, taking symbolism too far. It is true that our table is *like* an altar and the home is *like* a temple, but in the days when the Temple actually existed, nobody tried to make the home literally as pure as the Temple.

In fact, the priests had to go to the *mikveh* and put on clean robes every time before entering the Temple precisely because, in the ordinary world outside, they came into contact with things that were *tameh*, not ritually pure. And as the Talmud states, "While they [the priests] are clothed in the priestly garments, they are clothed in the priesthood; but when they are not wearing the garments, the priesthood is not upon them" (Zevachim 17b). We are also told how, after Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) took off the sacred garments and put on his own clothes to go home. So there was a clear line between sacred space and ordinary space, and the people understood where that line was.

But nowadays, some people are trying to maintain a Holy Temple level of purity at home, and it has become overly restrictive. The last Lubavitcher Rebbe even went so far as to say that children should not play with *toys* in the shape of non-kosher animal species. My first reaction was, "What? No more Noah's Ark models? No Garden of Eden coloring pages?" The answer I got was that if kids played with these toys, they might eat forbidden species later in life. Which is absurd. I have never in my life wanted to eat bears because I had a teddy bear.

I did later learn that the Lubavitcher Rebbe made exceptions for pictures or models of animals that were mentioned in the Torah if this would help children learn the structural differences between the species, both kosher and non-

kosher, or to understand references to animals in the Psalms, etc. So I guess a Noah's Ark model isn't really so out of bounds. Still, this struck me as a rather utilitarian approach that didn't really encourage an appreciation of nature for its own sake.

Going back to the cat story again, when I worked as a nursing home chaplain back in the 1980s, I met elderly Jews from Eastern Europe who told me that it was common to have a "synagogue cat" to protect the books from mice. In fact, it was common in general to have library cats. Books were leather-bound back then, with glues made from animal hide, so they were very tempting for rodents to chew. Now, if our great-grandparents had no problem with letting a cat roam among the holy books in shul, why should there be a problem with keeping a cat in the house?

**Richard:** There are also health benefits to having animals around. Studies have shown that heart patients who own a dog or cat recover faster and have a lower mortality rate than those who don't. Simply stroking a cat's fur as she purrs or watching fish swim in an aquarium has been proven to lower blood pressure. Even prisoners who have a view of the outdoors from their cells do better than those who don't. So there is something very positive and healing about being in a natural environment and interacting with God's creation.

Unfortunately, most Jews are missing out on those health benefits, because they don't have any contact with animals. Period. Contrast this with the patriarchs and their descendants, who were shepherds. Since their work led them into many types of natural settings, including mountains, prairies, wilderness, and desert, they developed a love and appreciation of natural wonders and beauty. According to Charles W. Eliot, "No race has ever surpassed the Jewish descriptions of either the beauties or the terrors of the nature which environs man."

With this firsthand experience, our ancestors saw, on a daily basis, how God is concerned about the environment and all the creatures. In the *Baruch Sheh'amar* prayer, which is recited every day in traditional synagogues, it states that, "Blessed is the One [God] Who has compassion on the earth; blessed is the One Who has compassion on the creatures



[animals and people]." And, as we said in our discussion above, Judaism teaches that human beings, uniquely created in God's image, are to imitate God's positive attributes. So we should also exhibit concern and compassion toward the earth's environment and all of God's creatures.

**Yonassan:** Agreed. Although we can't all be shepherds, I think we can make a greater effort to develop a better connection with nature in whatever circumstances we might find ourselves. Being "too busy" is not an excuse. There is a Hasidic story about a wagon driver who came to the Baal Shem Tov, distressed that he always had to hit the road before dawn and could never attend weekday morning prayers. The Rebbe's answer? Look up at the stars in the pre-dawn sky and recite the words of Isaiah 40: "Lift up your eyes on high, and see: Who has created these?"

I am very lucky to live in an area where I can actually do this. On a clear night I not only see the stars, I can see the Milky Way and, in the proper season, meteor showers and lunar eclipses. But even for city dwellers whose view of the sky is obscured by bright lights and air pollution, it is still possible to feel the awe of God's creation. As we go about our daily activities, we can open our eyes and *really see* the things around us. We can learn to pay attention. As the saying goes, "Stop and smell the flowers." It doesn't take much extra time to do this, but it does take a conscious effort.

**Richard:** But what about that line in Pirkei Avot 3:9 that says, if a person interrupts his Torah study to say, "How beautiful is this tree," etc, he "forfeits his life"? How would you answer those who cite this verse to prove that we should not "waste" our time on nature study?

**Yonassan:** Much has been written on this sentence, and from many different viewpoints. I've heard stories of kids who had taken this so much to heart, that they refused to go on nature hikes at Jewish summer camps. But I don't think this was the intent, because we have so many other teachings telling us to appreciate God's creation. We even have a special blessing to

be recited during the month of Nissan when one sees the trees starting to bloom. Obviously, in order to do that, one must first stop and look at the trees! If you don't notice the blossoms and focus your attention on them, then how can you make the blessing properly?

The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Israel Meir Hachohen) was of the opinion that this sentence in *Pirkei Avot* applied in ancient times, when all learning was done orally through memorization, and it was usual for students to recite their lessons while walking along the road. In those days, interrupting the recitation to admire the scenery could mean losing the text altogether. But now that we have books available, and learning usually takes place in the House of Study, the Chofetz Chaim recommended providing oneself with printed volumes to learn from. (Chofetz Chaim *On the Torah*, Deuteronomy section.)

However, I prefer the interpretation of Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch. He says that the problem is that the person in question *stopped learning* in order to admire the tree, whereas in reality, *admiring a tree should be part of his Torah learning*. In other words, the tree should elevate his religious consciousness, not distract from it. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi used to say a similar thing when I studied with him in the 1980s: "Bring it all back to Torah, bring it all back to Torah." So nature study should enrich our understanding of Torah, and draw us closer to God.

**Richard:** That makes much more sense. Because, in the Sabbath morning service, the following prayer is recited: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Psalms 19:2). I imagine that would also apply to trees and other created things, because they are also part of God's handiwork. I sincerely believe that, if more Jews become aware of these many beautiful Jewish teachings about nature and take them to heart, it would have great potential to help revitalize Judaism. It might be another factor that would help us move our imperiled planet toward a more just, humane, and environmentally sustainable path.

## **Annotated Bibliography & Suggested Reading**

The following are a sampling of the books that we have found useful and informative on issues discussed in this book. We do not necessarily agree 100% with everything that all of these authors have to say, but we do believe in examining the issues from multiple perspectives before making personal decisions. Prepare to have your assumptions challenged!

### **1. Books relating Judaism to current issues**

Amsel, Nachum, *The Jewish Encyclopedia of Moral and Ethical Issues*. Jason Aronson, Northvale, New Jersey, 1996. Short essays summarizing Jewish teachings on many ethical issues.

Ben-Ami, Jeremy, *A New Voice for Israel: Fighting for the Survival of the Jewish Nation*, Macmillan, New York, 2011. The director of J Street argues for respectful dialogues in the Jewish community and for the two-state solution.

Benstein, Jeremy, *The Way Into Judaism and the Environment*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 2006. A founder and associate director of Israel's Heschel Center for Environmental Learning and Leadership relates the Torah and other traditional sources to Israeli and world environmental crises, the proper treatment of animals, and dietary concerns.

Bernstein, Ellen, *The Splendor of Creation: A Biblical Ecology*, Pilgrim Press, Cleveland, Ohio, 2005. Commentary on Genesis relating each of the seven days to being in harmony with nature.

Bernstein, Ellen, editor, *Ecology and the Jewish Spirit: Where Nature and the Spirit Meet*. Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1998. A wide variety of Jewish perspectives on environmental issues.

Bernstein, Ellen and Dan Fink, *Let the Earth Teach You Torah: A Guide to Teaching Ecological Wisdom*, Shomrei Adamah, Wyncote, Pennsylvania, 1992. Guidebook for teaching Jewish perspectives on the human relationship with nature.

Broyde, Michael and John Witte (editors), *Human Rights in Judaism: Cultural, Religious, and Political Perspectives*, Jason Aronson, Northvale, New Jersey, 1998. A broad range of Jewish approaches on human rights issues.

Bush, Lawrence, and Jeffrey Dekro, *Jews, Money, and Social Responsibility: Developing a "Torah of Money" for Contemporary Life*, the Shefa Fund, Philadelphia, 1993. Insights on Torah teachings related to obtaining and donating money.

Carmell, Aryeh, *Masterplan: Judaism: Its Program, Meanings, Goals*, Feldheim, Jerusalem, 1991. Applies Judaism's mitzvah system to many aspects of life, including science, society, government, and the environment.

Elon, Ari; Hyman, Naomi Mara; and Waskow, Arthur (editors), *Trees, Earth, and Torah: A Tu B'Shevat Anthology*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1999. Exactly what the title says: Many Torah teachings about trees, their importance in Judaism and ecology, and how Tu B'Shevat evolved over the centuries into the modern "Jewish Earth Day."

Dorff, Elliot.N., *The Way Into Tikkun Olam*, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 2005. Explores current

societal challenges and how Jewish teachings can be used to address them.

Doueck, Jack, *The Chesed Boomerang: How Acts of Kindness Enrich Our Lives*, Yagdiyl Torah Publications, Deal, New Jersey: 1999. Heartwarming and inspiring stories about how acts of kindness benefit both the giver and the receiver.

Gershom, Yonassan, *Eight Candles of Consciousness: Essays on Jewish Nonviolence*, Lulu Press, Raleigh, NC, 2009. Anthology of articles, letters, and poems on peace, justice, and ecology issues by Rabbi Gershom over the past 40 years. Includes the story of how he became a vegetarian.

Hakohen, Yosef Ben Shlomo, *The Universal Jew: Letters to My Progressive Father*, Feldheim, Jerusalem/New York, 1995. Judaism's universal messages, including a discussion of people's obligations to the earth and its creatures.

Heschel, Abraham J., *The Insecurity of Freedom: Essays on Human Freedom*. Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, New York, 1967. Wide ranging collection of essays addressing Judaism to such issues as Jewish education, civil rights, Soviet Jewry, and Judaism in the Diaspora.

——— *The Prophets*. Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1962 (two volumes). Excellent analysis of history's greatest protesters against injustice and their messages.

Hirsch, Richard G., *The Way of the Upright: A Jewish View of Economic Justice*, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New York, 1973. Summary of Jewish ethical teachings related to economic behavior.

——— *Thy Most Precious Gift, Peace in Jewish Tradition*. Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New York, 1974. Provides many sources for traditional Jewish views on war/peace issues.

Hirsch, Samson Raphael, *Horeb*, translated by Dayan I. Grunfeld, Soncino Press, New York/London/Jerusalem, 1962.

Analyzes a wide variety of mitzvot, including those that teach us how to relate to the earth and its creatures.

——— *The Nineteen Letters*. Feldheim, Jerusalem/New York, 1969. Passionate defense of traditional Judaism through eloquent letters to a skeptic.

Jacobs, Jill, *There Shall Be No Needy: Pursuing Social Justice Through Jewish Law & Tradition*, Jewish Lights, Woodstock, Vermont, 2010. Ancient Jewish texts used to inform our approaches to current issues.

——— *Where Justice Dwells: A Hands-On Guide to Doing Social Justice in Your Jewish Community*, Jewish Lights, Woodstock, Vermont, 2011.

Jewish Peace Fellowship, *Roots of Jewish Non-Violence*, 2010. Several essays, including one by Richard Schwartz, on Jewish teachings on peace, non-violence, conscientious objection, and *tikkun olam*.

Kalechofsky, Roberta, ed., *Judaism and Animals Rights: Classical and Contemporary Responses*, Micah Publications, Marblehead, Massachusetts, 1992. A wide variety of articles on animal rights, vegetarianism, and animal experimentation, from the perspective of Judaism.

——— *Vegetarianism and Judaism: A Guide for Everyone*, Micah Publications, Marblehead, Massachusetts, 1992. Nice discussion of all the reasons Jews should consider being vegetarians. Includes an excellent presentation of how the philosophy of René Descartes changed the Western perspective of animals from sentient living beings to mere “machines,” thereby opening the way for today’s abusive factory farms.

Kushner, Tony and Alisa Solomon, editors, *Wrestling With Zionism: Progressive Jewish-American Responses to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. A wide variety of essays from progressive perspectives on many aspects of the Mideast conflict.

Lamm, Norman, editor, *The Good Society*, Viking Press, New York, 1974. A survey of Jewish teachings on such issues and concepts as compassion, charity, ethics, and peace.

Landau Yechezkel, *Violence and the Value of Life in Jewish Tradition*, Oz V'Shalom, Jerusalem, 1984. Essays from rabbis of various backgrounds on Jewish teachings related to peace and non-violence.

Lerner, Michael, *Jewish Renewal: A Path to Healing and Transformation*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York: 1994. A rethinking of Judaism by a Jewish Renewal leader with the aim of building spiritually rich Jewish lives and a more just society.

——— *Embracing Israel/Palestine: A Strategy to Heal and Transform the Middle East*. Tikkun Books, San Francisco, 2012. Excellent summary of the issues and possible peace settlement. Especially valuable are the 25 challenging questions and answers from both sides' perspectives.

Levine, Aaron, *Free Enterprise and Jewish Law: Aspects of Jewish Business Ethics*. Ktav, New York, 1980. A comprehensive analysis of Jewish teachings on business-related issues.

Polner, Murray, and Stefan Merken, editors, *Peace, Justice And Jews: Reclaiming Our Tradition*, Bunim & Bannigan, New York, 2007. A gathering of voices demonstrating the remarkable depth of thinking and commitment by Jews seeking justice and peace.

Polner Murray, and Goodman, Naomi, editors, *The Challenge of Shalom: The Jewish Tradition of Peace and Justice*, New Society Publishers, Philadelphia, 1994. Anthology of articles by Jews of all backgrounds, from Orthodox to secular, on the tradition of Jewish non-violence, conscientious objection, war resistance, and peace activism.

Rose, Aubrey (editor), *Judaism and Ecology*, Cassell, New York/ London, 1992. Collection of very readable essays on environmental issues, from Jewish perspectives.

Sacks, Chief Rabbi Jonathan, *The Dignity of Difference: How To Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*. Continuum, London/New York, 2003. "...a plea — the most forceful I could make — for tolerance in an age of extremism."

Schwartz, Richard H., *Judaism and Vegetarianism*, third edition, Lantern, New York, 2001. Argues that Jewish mandates to show compassion to animals, preserve health, help feed the hungry, preserve the earth, conserve resources, and pursue peace point to vegetarianism as the ideal diet.

——— *Judaism and Global Survival*, second edition, Lantern, New York, 2002. Jewish teachings on involvement and protest, justice, the environment, energy, climate change, peace, population, and vegetarianism.

Sears, David, *Compassion for Humanity in the Jewish Tradition*, Jason Aronson, Northvale, New Jersey, 1998. Statements from classical Jewish sources on universal issues.

——— *The Vision of Eden: Animal Welfare and Vegetarianism in Jewish Law and Mysticism*. Orot, Jerusalem, 2003. An almost encyclopedic treatment of vegetarianism and all aspects of Jewish teachings on the proper treatment of animals.

Shatz, H., Chaim I. Waxman, and Nathan J. Diamant (editors), *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law*, Jason Aronson, Northvale, New Jersey, 1997. Wide variety of essays by leading Jewish thinkers on the Jewish mandate to heal and repair the world.

Siegel, Danny, *Family Reunion: Making Peace in the Jewish Community: Sources and Resources from Tanach, Halachah, and Midrash*. Spring Valley, New York, 1989. Compelling argument, based on Jewish teachings, for peaceful resolutions of conflicts between Jews at all levels.



Slifkin, Natan, *Man and Beast: Our Relationship with Animals in Jewish Law and Thought*, Yashar Books, 2006. Israel's "zoo rabbi" examines many animal issues from an Orthodox halachic perspective. Not a vegetarian book, but nevertheless an excellent resource with well-reasoned arguments and materials.

—— *Perek Shirah: Nature's Song*. ZooTorah, second edition, 2011. Verse-by-verse commentary on *Perek Shirah*, the ancient Jewish poem that uses verses from Scripture to illustrate the "songs" of the different components and inhabitants of the natural world – and their spiritual lessons for humanity.

Strassfeld, Sharon and Michael, *The Third Jewish Catalog — Creating Community*, Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, 1980. Contains sections on social justice, ecology, and compassion for animals.

Tal, Alon, *Pollution in a Promised Land: An Environmental History of Israel*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 2002. Very comprehensive analysis of environmental developments in Israel by the country's outstanding environmentalist.

Tamari, Meir, *With All Your Possessions: Jewish Ethics and Economic Life*, Jason Aronson, Northvale, New Jersey, 1998. Torah teachings on a range of economic issues.

Vorspan, Albert and Saperstein, David, *Jewish Dimensions of Social Justice: Tough Moral Choices of Our Time*, Union of American Hebrew Congregations Press, New York, 1998. Reform Jewish perspectives on social justice, environmental, peace, civil liberties, and other issues.

Vorspan, Albert, *Great Jewish Debates and Dilemmas: Jewish Perspectives on Moral Issues in Conflict in the Eighties*. Union of American Hebrew Congregations, New York, 1980. Discussion of controversial issues facing the Jewish community and the world, such as energy, ecology, economic justice, zero population growth, and race relations.

Waskow, Arthur I., *Godwrestling — Round 2: Ancient Wisdom, Future Paths*, Jewish Lights, Woodstock, Vermont, 1996. Excellent application of Jewish tradition to “wrestle” with current problems such as injustice and violence.

Waskow, Arthur I., (editor.), *Torah of the Earth: Exploring 4,000 Years of Ecology in Jewish Thought*. Jewish Lights, Woodstock, Vermont, 2000 (two volumes). Wide variety of essays on various environmental issues.

Yanklowitz, Shmuly, *Jewish Ethics & Social Justice: A Guide for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Derusha Publishing, Pompano Beach, Florida, 2011. Wide-ranging, challenging essays by the founder and director of Uri L’Tzedek and Shamayim v’Aretz.

## **2. General books on global survival issues**

Bingham, the Rev. Canon Sally G., *Love God, Heal Earth: 21 Leading Religious Voices Speak Out on Our Sacred Duty to Protect the Environment*, Saint Lynn’s Press, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 2009.

Brower, Michael, and Leon, Warren (editors), *The Consumers’ Guide to Effective Environmental Choices: Practical Advice From the Union of Concerned Scientists*. Three Rivers Press, New York, 1999. Discusses the contributions of various human activities to environmental threats. (The worst are driving cars and eating meat).

Brown, Lester R., *Plan B 4.0: Mobilizing to Save Civilization*, W.W. Norton and Company, New York/London, 2009. Excellent analysis of climate change and other threats to humanity and a comprehensive, well reasoned plan to avoid a global catastrophe.

——— *World On the Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse*, W. W. Norton and Company, New York and London, 2011. Argues that the world is in great peril and

that to prevent catastrophes there must be, “a massive cut in carbon emissions by 80 percent by 2020 [it actually increased by six percent since the book was published]; the stabilization of world population at no more than 8 billion by 2040; the eradication of poverty; and the restoration of forests, soils, aquifers, and fisheries.”

Campbell, T. Colin, with Thomas M. Campbell II, *The China Study: The Most Comprehensive Health Study Ever Conducted and the Startling Implications for Diet, Weight Loss and Long-term Health*, Benbella Books, Dallas, Texas, 2004. Excellent discussion of the ramifications of what the NY Times called “the grand prix of epidemiology” and the factors that prevent shifts to healthier diets.

Foer, Jonathan Safran, *Eating Animals*, Little, Brown and Company: Back Bay Books, New York/Boston/London, 2009. Very readable account of Foer’s journey to vegetarianism, with many thoughtful arguments.

French, Hilary, *Vanishing Borders: Protecting the Planet in the Age of Globalization*, W.W. Norton, New York/London, 2000. How to respond to societal problems caused by globalization.

Gore, Albert, *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergence of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It*, Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pennsylvania, 2006. The book version of the Academy Award-winning documentary, with valuable pictures, charts, and discussions.

\_\_\_\_\_, *Our Choice: A Plan to Solve the Climate Crisis*, Rodale Press, Emmaus, Pennsylvania, 2009. A follow-up to *An Inconvenient Truth* with a deeper, more comprehensive analysis and a consideration of the many steps necessary to avoid the impending climate catastrophe. It briefly discusses the value of plant-based diets in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Hoggan, James, *Climate Cover-Up: the Crusade to Deny Global Warming*, Greystone Books, Vancouver/Toronto/Berkeley, 2009. Prepare to get very angry while reading of the

major steps some corporations are taking to mislead the public about climate change in order to maintain their huge profits.

Lappe, Frances Moore, *Diet For a Small Planet*, twentieth anniversary edition, Ballantine, New York, 1991. Shows the tremendous wastefulness and inefficiency of animal-based agriculture.

Lappe, Frances Moore, et al. *World Hunger: Twelve Myths*, Grove Press, New York, 1998. Dispels common myths like “overpopulation is the main cause of hunger” that make it difficult to find real solutions.

Lequire, Stan L. (editor), *The Best Preaching On Earth: Sermons on Caring for Creation*, Judson Press, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, 1996. Eloquent Christian sermons on environmental issues. Many arguments based on Jewish scriptures.

Louv, Richard, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, Algonquin Books, 2008. Compelling examination of how today’s children are no longer spending enough time outdoors with nature, and how this is seriously affecting their physical and mental health, as well as the health of our planet.

Patterson, Charles, *Eternal Treblinka: Our Treatment of Animals and the Holocaust*, Lantern Books, New York, 2002. Explores how the Holocaust was rooted in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century automation of slaughterhouses, and how treating people “like animals” leads to dehumanization, desensitization to suffering, and genocide. Includes an indepth analysis of animal and vegetarian themes in Isaac B. Singer’s writings.

Regenstein, Lewis, *Replenish the Earth: The Teachings of the World’s Religions on Protecting Animals and the Environment*, Crossroads, New York, 1991. A comprehensive discussion on the teachings of the Bible and the world’s religions on protecting and preserving animals and the natural environment.

Rifkin, Jeremy, *Beyond Beef: The Rise and Fall of the Cattle Culture*, Dutton, New York, 1992. Powerful analysis of the many negative effects related to the raising of cattle and the consumption of beef.

Robbins, John, *The Food Revolution: How your Diet can Help save Your Life and the World*, Conari Press, Berkeley, California, 2001. Documents health, animal rights, and ecological reasons for not eating flesh, eggs, and dairy.

Tuttle, Will, *The World Peace Diet: Eating for Spiritual Health and Social Harmony*, Lantern Books, New York, 2005. Very comprehensive, eloquent analysis of the many reasons for vegetarianism and of the cultural factors that support the widespread eating of animal products.

Worldwatch Institute, *State of the World 2010: Transforming Cultures: From Consumerism to Sustainability*, W. W. Norton, New York/ London, 2010. Why consumer patterns must change in order to avoid environmental disasters. Previous editions of this annual report are also worth reading.

Worldwatch Institute, *Vital signs 2010: The Environmental Trends That Are Shaping Our Future*, Worldwatch Institute, Washington, D.C., 2010. "From rising meat and seafood production to changes in the climate, *Vital Signs 2010* documents 24 trends that are shaping our future and includes concise analyses and clear graphs."

### **3. Miscellaneous books on politics, theology, etc.**

Beliefnet editors, *From the Ashes: A Spiritual Response to the Attack on America*, Rodale Press, Inc. and Beliefnet, Inc., Emmaus, Pennsylvania, 2001. "Experience, Strength, and Hope from Spiritual Leaders and Ordinary Citizens." Prominent religious leaders, theologians, and others from many diverse faiths grapple with the difficult issues of anger, revenge, forgiveness, faith, belief in (and the nature of) God after 9/11. No easy answers, but lots of good questions.

Curtis, Richard H., and McMahon, Janet, editors, *Seeing the Light: Personal Encounters with the Middle East and Islam*, American Educational Trust, Washington D.C., 1997. Anthology of personal narratives by people from many different social, religious, and political backgrounds, examining Middle East issues from multiple perspectives. Includes Yonassan Gershom's "The Peace Stone," about a life-changing encounter with a homeless Palestinian on the streets of Minneapolis.

Franken, Al, *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*, Dutton: The Penguin Group, New York, 2003. Minnesota's Senator Franken (D) presents a humorous but also well-researched exposé on how the right-wing media distorts the facts for its own ends, taking on Ann Coulter, Sean Hannity, Bill O'Reilly, Rupert Murdoch and others. (*Fox News* tried to sue Franken over this book, but only succeeded in giving him lots of free publicity!)

Harris, Alisa, *Raised Right: How I Untangled My Faith from Politics*, Waterbrook Press, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 2011. Soul-searching memoir by a woman raised in a family where simplistic answers and right-wing politics were synonymous with Christianity, and how she learned to broaden her perspective on today's social issues. Jews can learn from her story also: Their one-issue focus is abortion, ours is Israel, but the tunnel vision syndrome is often the same.

Press, Eval, *Beautiful Souls: Saying No, Breaking Ranks, and Heeding the Voice of Conscience in Dark Times*, Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, New York, 2012. A moving exploration of what motivates ordinary people to do individual acts of courage, conscience, and resistance in dangerous times. Includes an excellent chapter on Israeli soldiers who refuse to serve in the occupied territories, and the serious social pressures they face. (See the entry for "Yesh Gvul" in Appendix E.)

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Page 125 – American Muslim children – photo by David Shankbone.

Page 126 – Brooklyn’s 99%, photo by David Shankbone.

Page 146 – Socialist Jesus, photo by David Shankbone.

Page 164 – Haifa tent city, photo by “Hanay.”

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## About the cover

The background photo on the front cover (#ISS028-E-020072 from the NASA files) was taken aboard the International Space Station on July 31, 2011, when the sun was just below the horizon. When observed from space, the palette of gaseous layers of our atmosphere reminds us about the fragility and tenuousness of the thin cocoon that shelters life on Earth from the cold harsh vacuum of outer space. Without this precious envelope of air, life on Earth could not exist.

July 31, 2001 was also at the dark of the moon, or what is called a "new moon" in common language. A thin crescent of the new moon appears to hang above the Earth, although in reality it is more than 238,855 miles away. On the Jewish calendar, the month always begins on the new moon (*rosh chodesh*) symbolizing a progression from darkness into greater light. The important holiday of Rosh Hashanah, which begins the High Holy Days season of repentance in the fall, also begins on a new moon. Perhaps the message of this photo is to encourage us to think about how we are treating our planet's fragile atmosphere, and to change our polluting ways before it is too late.



## About the Authors

**Richard H. Schwartz, Ph.D.**, is the author of *Judaism and Vegetarianism*, *Judaism and Global Survival*, and *Mathematics and Global Survival* and has over 150 articles and 25 podcasts online at [JewishVeg.com/schwartz](http://JewishVeg.com/schwartz). He is President of Jewish Vegetarians of North America (JVNA) and the Society of Ethical and Religious Vegetarians (SERV), director of the Veg Climate Alliance, a patron of the International Jewish Vegetarian Society, and on the advisory committee of the Farm Animal Rights Movement (FARM). He is associate producer of the 2007 documentary, *A Sacred Duty: Applying Jewish Values to Help Heal the World*. In 1987, he was selected as Jewish Vegetarian of the Year by JVNA, and in 2005, he was inaugurated into the North American Vegetarian Society's Hall of Fame. He is a professor emeritus of mathematics at the College of Staten Island, has been married since 1960, and has 3 children and 10 grandchildren.



**Rabbi Yonassan Gershom** is a freelance writer and author of 49 *Gates of Light*, *Beyond the Ashes*, *From Ashes to Healing*, *Eight Candles of Consciousness* and *Jewish Themes in Star Trek*, as well as many feature articles. He was born in Berkeley, California, grew up in the Philadelphia area, and now lives on a hobby farm in northern Minnesota with his wife Caryl, three dogs, two geese, 13 cats, a flock of chickens and a bunch of wildlife. His blog, [Notes from a Jewish Thoreau](#), explores connections between traditional Judaism, animals, ecology, and his personal nature observations.